

# **Promoting Intercultural Understanding in Australia: An Evaluation of Local Government Initiatives in Victoria**

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**Undertaken by:**  
**The Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights (CCHR)**  
**Deakin University**

**in partnership with**

**The Darebin City Council**

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**Project Team**  
**Deakin University**



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## **Acronyms**

AAC	Australian Arabic Council
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse or Cultural and Linguistic Diversity
CCHR	Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights
CWCC	Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture
DECC	Darebin Ethnic Communities Council
DIMIA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
EOCV	Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria
ESB	English Speaking Background
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ICV	Islamic Council of Victoria
IWWCV	Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria
LA	Language Aide
MAU	Multicultural Affairs Unit
MCS	Multicultural Communication Service
MTL	Multilingual Telephone Line
MVA	Multicultural Victoria Act
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
SD	Statistical Division
SLA	Statistical Local Area
VMC	Victorian Multicultural Commission



## **Executive Summary**

The Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights at Deakin University has partnered with the Multicultural Affairs Unit (Community Planning and Advocacy Branch) from the Darebin City Council to conduct research on perceptions towards cultural diversity and multicultural policies and how to improve intercultural relations in Australian society. The project focuses on the experience of Muslim Australians as a migrant community that has been subject in recent years to an increase in racist attitudes and racialised discourses. Through an analysis of the strategies employed by Darebin City Council, this project investigates the cultural and policy challenges facing the successful integration of minorities in increasingly globalised societies. This monograph, *Promoting Intercultural Understanding in Australia: An Evaluation of Local Government Initiatives in Victoria*, is the product of this research.

This project considers three basic questions:

- 1) Is multiculturalism, as a policy, losing credibility in Australia?
- 2) Has the level of discrimination against Muslim groups and communities in Australia increased in response to recent international events?
- 3) Is local government the most appropriate vehicle to address intercultural understanding in the community?

The specific aims of this project are:

- to identify and analyse local government initiatives in the area of intercultural relations,
- to explore the specific factors and strategies which facilitate or impede the success of local government responses,
- to evaluate the attitudes towards local government policy interventions in a wider climate of increasing social exclusion and racism against Muslim minority communities in Australia.

## **Methodology**

The project employed a triangulated design using secondary analysis together with the generation of qualitative and quantitative data sets. A literature review of key themes and debates generated a conceptual and theoretical context for the project and provided a background for survey and interview design. Two surveys were administered:

- 1) an internal survey of Darebin City Council employees,
- 2) an external survey of a stratified sampling of residents in the Darebin community.

Both the internal and the external surveys were comprised of a combination of questions eliciting scaled, open-ended, closed and partially-closed responses from each respondent. The primary objective of the surveys was to explore local perceptions about diversity in the Darebin community, perceptions of the concept of

multiculturalism, of the role of the different levels of government in terms of education and funding for services and to explore attitudes towards Muslim communities in the Darebin area.

There were a total of 262 respondents to the internal survey, which represents approximately 33 percent of the total staff numbers in the Darebin City Council. A total of 300 interview-style external surveys of 10-15 minutes duration were conducted amongst a stratified sample of Darebin community residents.

In addition to the internal and external quantitative surveys, this project also conducted a number of interviews with Council employees, community leaders, including religious leaders and spokespersons of relevant NGOs in Darebin, local business owners and general community members. Twenty-two individual interviews of 1-2 hours were conducted according to four levels of stratification: demographics, connection to Muslim communities, gender and other factors. The purpose of these interviews was to better understand social attitudes that facilitate or reduce social exclusion and racially motivated discrimination, and the potential for informed policy responses at the local government level.

Finally, the existing policy framework and project initiatives of Darebin City Council in relation to diversity were analysed and assessed in light of other research findings.

## **Key Findings**

The findings of this research project need to be considered within the specific characteristics and limitations of the type of data collected and the broader context within which it was elicited. For example the fact that 33% of council employees completed the surveys raises questions as to the reasons why the other 67% did not take part. More importantly, it means that the generalisability of results cannot be taken for granted. Similarly, the interviews with community and religious leaders cannot be viewed as representative of the whole population.

The key points summarised below are significant, however, insofar as they provide insights into attitudes and perceptions held by a large section of the employees of Darebin City Council and of members of the community living in the area. The findings also highlight in a consistent manner certain views held about the meaning of key concepts such as 'multiculturalism', 'tolerance' and 'exclusion'. The following section provides a succinct thematic summary of the more significant findings.

### **Perceptions of multiculturalism:**

The vast majority (70-80%) of council employees and Darebin community members have positive views of multiculturalism and believe that cultural diversity enriches the community as a whole. There is nevertheless a small but sizeable group in the community (between 5-15%) who hold negative and/or cynical views about multiculturalism. Between these extremes there is disagreement about what multiculturalism means in practice and which services and projects should be funded under a multicultural framework.

### **Attitudes towards Muslim Australians:**

The majority of the respondents have empathy towards Australian Muslim communities and acknowledge that they have been targeted because of recent

international events. There is nevertheless evidence of misperceptions, stereotypes and some negative views of Muslims within the community. These views are directly related to the international security context in the post 9/11 period and may translate to both direct and indirect forms of discrimination.

In the post 9/11 period, Muslims within the Darebin community have experienced incidents of discrimination including physical attack, surveillance, verbal harassment and avoidance. There is a feeling amongst Muslims in the community that they have been singled out and targeted by the Australian Government and that they are viewed with suspicion by mainstream society.

**Perceptions of local government:**

There is general support for councils as the appropriate level of government to foster intercultural harmony. There were also concerns that this emphasis should not translate into a loss of overarching support from State and Federal levels of Government towards the same goal.

Residents and Council employees were generally enthusiastic about existing diversity initiatives undertaken by Darebin City Council such as street parties, information sessions and interpreting and translating services. However a number of community respondents were unaware of council activities and/or had the perception that multicultural services are ‘only for migrants.’

Darebin City Council’s strategic approach to diversity provides a meaningful and productive framework through which to continue and develop multicultural policies. While previous and existing approaches, collaborations and projects were praised by council staff and community members alike, there remains a need to target services specifically to encourage intercultural harmony in the post 9/11 environment. There is also the ongoing need to counter the perception that multicultural policies are ‘only for migrants’ and to generate awareness of the benefits of diversity for the community as a whole.

There is a general level of agreement within the community that mutual dialogue in the form of social and educational interactions was a good way of promoting intercultural harmony. A number of initiatives in this regard are evident amongst community leaders and amongst Muslim community leaders, in particular. These may offer a resource and point of collaboration for Council.

## **Recommendations**

### **A Recommendations Relating to Discrimination against Muslim Australians in the post 9/11 context**

- 1(a) Misperceptions about Muslims and Islam identified via the research clearly relate to the post 9/11 security context. Incidents of discrimination against Muslims reflect a heightened sense of insecurity. Therefore, attempts to reduce the frequency of such incidents and to challenge discriminatory views held against Muslims in Australia need to address *both* the stereotyping of Muslims *and* the feelings of insecurity that drive such behaviour. In other words, while sharing characteristics with more familiar patterns of racism against other migrant groups, the situation of Muslims in Darebin and other local government areas across Australia is also *specific* to the current political context and requires specific strategies in responses.
- 1(b) New forms of racism (see section 2.2.2) may help to explain the discrepancy between positive views of multiculturalism and incidents of cultural and religious discrimination. The positive views about multiculturalism expressed by an overwhelming majority of research respondents may well reflect the fact that racism and overtly discriminatory behaviour and opinions are now socially unacceptable. Hence racist and discriminatory sentiment may either be consciously withheld from survey and interview responses, and/or unconsciously exhibited in indirect ways (such as avoidance). Strategies attempting to combat and prevent racist and discriminatory behaviour must be informed by an awareness that those exhibiting such behaviours may not identify (verbally or consciously) as doing so.
- 1(c) There is an urgent need to address in innovative ways the sense of alienation from mainstream Australia exhibited by members of Australian Muslim communities. Muslims within the city of Darebin feel that they are targeted by the Australian government, that they are vulnerable to physical and verbal abuse, and that they are viewed with suspicion by the mainstream population. These feelings are prompted by specific incidents and experiences confirming their vulnerability. Therefore, there needs to be a stronger action plan aimed at promoting greater communication between Muslim and non-Muslim residents – not only to dispel stereotypes amongst non-Muslims, but also to bring Muslims in contact with sympathetic neighbours. Such cross-cultural encounters may have a two-way effect in reducing Muslims' feelings of alienation and mainstream Australians' anxiety about the cultures and values of Muslims.

## **B Recommendations Relating to Local Government's Role and Responsibilities**

- 2(a) The research findings illustrate that community respondents were strongly supportive of social activities organised by local government agencies as ways of fostering intercultural exchange and learning about other groups. At the same time, there was concern that such events did not always result in opportunities for *meaningful* exchanges. Some noted a tendency for such events to be focused on food and dance and thus to 'exoticise' cultural minorities rather than producing a mutual, two-way encounter that emphasised commonalities. While such events were generally perceived as being positive and successful, there remains a need to reflect upon how further and more meaningful opportunities for intercultural dialogue can be fostered in these contexts.
- 2(b) There is also strong support for formal and informal information sessions, held specifically for the purpose of increasing understanding of minority cultures and practices. In particular, these were popular with Muslims who viewed such sessions as a valuable opportunity to share information about Islam in a reliable manner and as a way of promoting dialogue rather than debate. Informational exchanges between schools and religious groups provide another opportunity for such exchanges. It is, therefore, important and helpful to hold such activities in locations requiring a minimal effort to access. Hence schools and workplaces would be especially appropriate venues.
- 2(c) With regard to Darebin city council's approach to diversity, there has been a shift (1) from a discourse of majority and minority cultures to an emphasis on relationships between groups; (2) from the special interests of particular groups to the benefits of diversity for the community as a whole; and (3) from assimilation into a homogenous culture to an openness to the productive dynamics produced by diversity. These new emphases lend themselves well to approaches and initiatives that respond to the *specificities* of tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim residents in the post 9/11 context. There continues to be a need for the ongoing development of specific strategies within this overarching framework that foster partnerships with community organisations and other levels of government to nurture inclusive and active citizenship across diverse groups.



## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Background**

The Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights at Deakin University has partnered with the Multicultural Affairs Unit (Community Planning and Advocacy Branch) from the Darebin City Council to conduct research into finding ways that local government can help improve intercultural relations in Australian society, with a particular emphasis on the experience of Muslim minorities.

This project considers three basic questions:

- 1) Is multiculturalism, as a policy, losing credibility in Australia?
- 2) Has the level of discrimination against Muslim groups and communities in Australia increased in response to recent international events?
- 3) Is local government the most appropriate vehicle to address intercultural understanding in the community?

At a time when the responsibility for many centralised services in Australia has been shifted to the level of local government, this project examined the impact of local government policies targeted at promoting intercultural harmony and understanding. Through an analysis of the strategies employed by Darebin City Council, this project investigates the cultural and policy challenges facing the successful integration of minorities in increasingly globalised societies.

### **1.1 Background to the Research Problem**

This project has been inspired by three reports assessing levels of social cohesion in Australia. The first of these is a summary report, *Islam & Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice Against Arab and Muslim Australians*, published by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) in June 2004 which considered whether levels of racial discrimination against Arab and Muslim Australians have increased in the aftermath of international incidents of terrorism (HREOC 2004). While this report confirmed that most Australians continue to uphold multicultural ideals despite changes to the international political climate, it also included disturbing accounts of individual acts of discrimination and/or racism against Arab and Muslim Australians. Such incidents included verbal abuse, personal attacks (such as spitting or forcibly removing veils from Muslim women), as well as the destruction of both private and public property (see also Cleland, 2002).

The second relevant report, *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia*, was released in December 2004 by The Department for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) and the Australian Multicultural Foundation. This report argued that Australia's response to terrorist extremism 'cannot merely be in military and security terms, important those these be, but must encompass cultural, commercial and educational realities in a global world' (Cahill *et al*, 2004:6). In Australia, those realities are shaped in the context of a multicultural society comprised of many different ethnic and religious communities. Accordingly, there is a need to enhance capacity building and linkages between these communities, and to engage

local government in this process (Cahill *et al*, 2004:67, 123-125; see also Lum *et al*, 2005).

Both of these reports call for local governments in Australia to renew their focus on policy objectives and proposals for social cohesion. A 2003 report *Acess, Services, Support, Respect: Local Governments Response to Cultural Diversity in Victoria*, sponsored by the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) indicated that these issues were already a priority and concern for many councils in Australia. This report assessed the policies of state-wide local governments according to their responsiveness to the challenges of cultural diversity.

Together these reports indicate that there is a critical need for ongoing and comprehensive analysis of policy approaches to cultural diversity and intercultural tension with a particular focus on local government. This monograph, *Promoting Intercultural Understanding in Australia: An Evaluation of Local Government Initiatives in Victoria* responds to this need.

This report appears amidst a backdrop of a number of key events in 2005 (the London subway bombings, riots in France, and unrest at Sydney's Cronulla beach). Each of these reflects both the prominence of intercultural issues in Australia and beyond as well as the controversial connections made between issues of culture and security. More specifically, these events have precipitated a range of media commentary directly linking multicultural policies in a causal relationship to increased insecurity and the threat of terrorism (further discussed in Chapter One). With the rise of terrorist activity, and the retaliatory 'war on terror', intercultural tensions between Arabic and Muslim minorities and their host societies have been exacerbated (Hage, 2002:243; Saikal, 2003). In this context, the need for mutual understanding and tolerance has become critical (HREOC, 2004; VMC, 2003). The importance and urgency of addressing questions of cultural diversity, intercultural tension and local governance cannot, therefore, be underestimated.

## **1.2 Project aims and objectives**

This report investigates experiences of intercultural relations in Darebin. More specifically, the main objective of this report is to develop a deeper understanding of the perceptions of local government policies in the inter-related areas of multiculturalism and intercultural harmony. It does so by analysing the multicultural policies and programs initiated by Darebin City Council, and by undertaking a broad quantitative and qualitative analysis of attitudes to diversity, multiculturalism and Muslim Australians amongst council staff and council constituents.

## **1.3 Research stages:**

Research for this report was conducted in eight stages:

- Literature review;
- Analysis of Darebin City Council's policies, projects and strategies in relation to multicultural issues;
- Construction of quantitative surveys and qualitative interview schedules.
- Distribution of quantitative surveys to Darebin City Council employees.



- Distribution of quantitative surveys to Darebin community leaders.
- Analysis of survey data;
- Conducting of qualitative interviews from a purposeful sampling of prominent business, religious and community leaders in the City of Darebin.
- Final comparative analysis and report writing.

The project was theoretically grounded by the critical review of key debates in recent literature relating to themes of racism, identity politics, social exclusion, intercultural relations, migration and local government. The review was supplemented by gap analysis of relevant policy documents, recent programs and strategies employed by Darebin City Council to address multicultural issues in the community. The critical analysis generated by these reviews provided the background for the qualitative and quantitative surveys and interviews that followed in the Darebin community. The first of these was a non-random survey of Darebin City Council employees, where all employees were given the opportunity to respond. The second was a representative survey of Darebin residents. The purpose of two streams of interviews was to compare the Council's approach to multiculturalism with community views. Face-to-face interviews were then conducted with Darebin community leaders to supplement the quantitative survey data and to further explore community perceptions of the issues.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review: Australian Multiculturalism and the Challenge of Diversity**

This chapter is designed to survey existing literature with reference to three key questions:

- 1) Is multiculturalism, as a policy, losing credibility in Australia?
- 2) Has the level of discrimination against Muslim groups and communities in Australia increased in response to recent international events?
- 3) Is local government the most appropriate vehicle to address intercultural understanding in the community?

The chapter is structured to reflect these three key areas of inquiry. There is a great deal of overlap, particularly in literature that is relevant to the first and second questions. Hence the first two sections of the chapter are closely linked, focusing firstly on issues of multiculturalism and migration in Australia and secondly on issues of social exclusion and discrimination amongst migrants. The specific case of Muslim minorities in Australia is integrated throughout the discussion. The third section of the chapter is more exclusively focused on the role of local government in relation to diversity. A concluding section responds directly to the three questions on the basis of the literature survey.

### **2.1 Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia**

Australia has an extremely diverse population, which presents challenges to policy makers at all levels of government. Cultural diversity is, as a result, a key feature of current government initiatives to address issues ranging from how to provide fair and equitable services to the various groups in society to the best ways to ensure that all residents know about and understand the range of services available to them. The objective is to ensure that all Australians, regardless of their background, are given a 'fair go' to achieve whatever goals they have set for themselves.

Multiculturalism was adopted in the 1970s as a cornerstone to this process. The advantage of multicultural policies, it was argued, was that they provided guidelines by which it was possible to bring diverse groups of people together while continuing to respect the different cultural and religious perspectives of all Australians. It was touted as a distinct improvement over the 'White Australia' past, whereby any individual that migrated to Australia was expected to become assimilated into mainstream society, and in the process, to let go of affiliations with their past life in another country.

Over the years, multiculturalism has received much criticism. For some, the problem is that multiculturalism has become too politicised. While the original ideals were well-meaning, what has developed is a process designed to attract political votes from a particular cultural group. Others argue that multicultural policies have actually worked against the original ideals they were based on and have divided society along ethnic and religious lines. The primary argument here is that migrants are now able to access the rights associated with the Australian way of life without having to assume the responsibilities necessary to build a cohesive, peaceful society. Is multiculturalism

really under threat in this country, or do the Australian people simply want to shift back to the original ideals these policies used to represent?

This section provides background to the rise of multiculturalism in Australia. It also considers how debate over multicultural policies has been affected in the context of the current security environment.

### **2.1.1 Multiculturalism as a policy framework**

From Federation until the 1960s and 1970s, Australian immigration policies were based on what was commonly described as the ‘White Australia policy’ that effectively excluded all forms of non-European immigration. The expectation was that all immigrants, in these cases from Europe, would come to Australia in search of a better life in the ‘lucky country’, enter Australia and settle, after which time, they would make every effort to ‘assimilate to its laws and cultural norms over time’. This would require the new immigrant to ‘cast aside any residual loyalty’ to their country of origin and assimilate into mainstream Australian culture (O’Sullivan, 2003:26).

These attitudes began to change in 1973, when Al Grassby, then Labour Minister for Immigration, released a paper entitled, *A Multi-cultural Society for the Future*, that outlined the ways in which the Australian government could respond to the increasing levels of migration to Australia from countries other than Europe. The question most commonly addressed is how Australia, as a country with an increasingly diverse population, would address and respect *difference* in society, or alternatively how Australians would express their identity in terms of pluralist values (Jayasuriya, 2003).

As characterised by Qadeer (1997:481), the philosophy of multiculturalism ‘envisages ...society as a mosaic of beliefs, practices and customs, not as a melting pot assimilating different racial and cultural groups’ into one homogenous whole. One of the first debates to emerge was thus over the merits and shortfalls of assimilation, which over time was argued to be oppressive and was gradually replaced by more inclusive ideas of integration and accommodation for newcomers in Australian society. Where migrant populations were once ‘thought of...as exerting only a limited influence culturally and politically on the host nation’, in that they were expected to acculturate to the overarching social context – the trend has shifted to an environment in which migrants no longer feel it necessary to forsake their former identity completely for their new identity (O’Sullivan, 2003:26-29).

The basic premise of this shift was that it is important for new migrants to retain at least traces of their cultural background, because without this acknowledgment, they may lose self-esteem and unwittingly find themselves excluded from society. By contrast, if their *difference* is valued, it is argued, new migrants would ‘join their new country with confidence and make a greater contribution’ to society through active participation. In this way, Australian multiculturalism was meant, at least in part, to represent and describe ‘the cultural and ethnic diversity’ of its population (Menadue, 2003:79-80). So for example, after World War II, high levels of immigration from countries including Italy and Greece brought a range of new cultural traditions to Australia. Through the integration process, what were previously perceived as foreign practices, such as Greek Orthodox celebrations of Easter, are now becoming an accepted feature of Australia’s diverse cultural background.

Via a multicultural policy approach, local and state governments were given the responsibility to help migrants become incorporated into their community (O'Sullivan, 2003:27; see also Kivisto, 2002:102). Whereas previously it had been the responsibility of the migrant to learn the ways of their new community and to make efforts to fit in, government agencies and representatives were now charged with the task of educating the mainstream population about the value and benefit of bringing people from diverse backgrounds into the community. This development was intended, over time, to create dialogue between mainstream society and new migrants, in conjunction with debates within Government. According to Menadue (2003:80), multiculturalism was to be 'a two-way process, each [group] adjusting to the other'.

The official definition adopted by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) for multiculturalism is as follows:

*'Australian multiculturalism is the philosophy, underlying Government policy and programs, that recognises, accepts, respects and celebrates our cultural diversity. It embraces the heritage of Indigenous Australians, early European settlement, our Australian-grown customs and those of the diverse range of migrants now coming to this country'.*

Associated with this are various responsibilities and benefits to all Australians, including:

- **Responsibilities of all** - all Australians have a civic duty to support those basic structures and principles of Australian society, which guarantee us our freedom and equality and enable diversity in our society to flourish.
- **Respect for each person** - subject to the law, all Australians have the right to express their own culture and beliefs and have a reciprocal obligation to respect the right of others to do the same.
- **Fairness for each person** - all Australians are entitled to equality of treatment and opportunity. Social equity allows us all to contribute to the social, political and economic life of Australia, free from discrimination, including on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, location, gender or place of birth.
- **Benefits for all** - all Australians benefit from productive diversity, that is, the significant cultural, social and economic dividends arising from the diversity of our population. Diversity works for all Australians.

Philip Ruddock, former Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, now Attorney General of Australia, summed up the Government's interpretation of multiculturalism in the following way:

*'Australia today is a culturally and linguistically diverse society and will remain so. Like our sophisticated migration program, our multicultural policy continues our tradition of successful nation building. It will help us to ensure that we meet the challenge of drawing the best from the many histories and cultures of the Australian people, within a framework of a unifying set of Australian values'.*

From this perspective, programs and policies premised on *productive diversity* have been promoted, whereby diversity was touted as Australia's 'key to ...productivity and competitiveness' and a 'valuable resource' to be harnessed through sound business principles and management (*Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity*, 2003). Coupled with an understanding of the various rights and responsibilities of

Australian citizenship, a strategic framework of settlement was provided that served as a 'public policy model for managing diversity mainly by catering largely to the symbolic and expressive needs of the culturally different' (Jayasuriya, 2003; see also Kivisto, 2002:109-110).

### **2.1.2 Changing perceptions of multiculturalism**

Despite formal multicultural policies, a long tradition of anxiety about physical and cultural invasion has impacted upon debates about migration and cultural diversity in Australia (Burke, 2001; Jupp, 2002). At different periods of history, different migrant groups have been marginalised on account of this anxiety.

For example, different groups of Asian immigrants brought many traditions with them. For some in Australia, these traditions were perceived as different enough to be threatening, which was seemingly reinforced by historic precedence where Asia was often portrayed as 'a force about to engulf the world's underpopulated zones', in particular Australia. As highlighted by David Walker, Australia experiences a 'periodic rediscovery of ... [its] proximity to Asia', with these experiences described as enough to make Australia the 'anxious nation' (Walker, 1999; see also Castles, 2004:852).

In this context, Asian migrants have been valued in the community for their entrepreneurial nature and celebrated for bringing such cultural festivals into prominence like Chinese New Year (Ibrahim & Galt, 2003:1107-1120). Conversely, they are often simultaneously feared because of what is perceived to be an intrinsic (and supposedly intentional) separation from the mainstream culture (Dunn, 2003:153-161; see also Burnett, 2004).

The contemporary international security context has played into Australia's long-standing anxieties about physical and cultural insecurity in particular ways. In turn, this has affected debate over multiculturalism as well as the particular cultural minorities most vulnerable to marginalisation in this context.

According to Liddle (2004) the September 11 attacks in New York City and Washington and the terrorist attack in Bali in 2002 generated an increased feeling of fear and vulnerability amongst Australians in general. He and others contend that the attacks reinforced a mindset whereby Westerners define themselves in opposition to a projected Muslim 'other' (Liddle, 2004; Menadue, 2003).

It is in this context that the increased incidence of discrimination directed against Arab and Muslim Australians following the Federal Government's publication of a booklet entitled *Let's Look Out for Australia: Protecting Our Way of Life from a Possible Terrorist Attack*, in February 2003 can be viewed. In this booklet the Prime Minister encouraged all Australians to report any 'suspicious activity to the authorities' in an attempt to forestall a terrorist attack on Australian soil. A HREOC report confirmed that reports of suspicious activity ranging in content and directed against Arab and/or Muslim Australians increased following the distribution of the booklet. That the majority of these reports were related to individuals engaged in 'routine domestic activities and family gatherings' (HREOC, 2004) highlights the links between discriminatory attitudes against Muslim Australians and the current security context.

With the subway bombings in London in July 2005, the security context was more directly referenced in connection with multicultural societies and policies. The London bombings were controversial in this respect when it became known that at least one of the bombers had been born and raised in England. For some commentators, this was proof positive that multiculturalism had simply not worked. Pamela Bone, an associate editor at *The Age* (18 July 2005) went as far as to ask: ‘Did the bomb blasts in the London Underground mark the death of multiculturalism?’ Bone was admittedly not calling for the complete renunciation of multiculturalism, but she nevertheless called for various limitations to be enforced (i.e. knowing exactly what is being taught in Islamic schools or what is being preached in Islamic Mosques across Australia).

Terry Lane, a Melbourne-based radio broadcaster and writer, went even further in his article to *The Age* (17 July 2005) when he described multiculturalism as a ‘repulsive word denoting an ugly concept’. In contrast to past policies where migrants integrated into society and their children and/or their children’s children would become Australians without qualification, he had the following to say about multicultural policies and ideals:

*‘Multiculturalism, based on the assumption of ghettos of perpetual difference and special preferment, is bound to foster violence by those who feel either superior to, or excluded from, the national culture. Australians are by nature assimilationist, and we are right to be so’.*

Andrew Bolt, writing for *The Herald Sun* (20 July 2005), made it clear which groups were targeted by comments such as these: ‘Whichever way I turn, what else can I think about Islam – or Arab Islam at least – but that it is an enemy of our culture, our society?’

In light of this attitudinal shift, and despite the rise of official multiculturalism in the 1970s, Australia has recently been described as a country where exclusions are now clearly directed against Arab and Muslim minority groups (Porter, 2003:1-7; Saeed, 2003:188-193; Cleland, 2002). These exclusions occur in the context of ongoing debates over the effectiveness and desirability of multiculturalism as a policy framework.

### **2.1.3 Transnational Migration and Patterns of Identification**

Traditional conceptions of acculturation where migrant populations gradually adapt to their new environment without much assistance have been challenged by the expectation that governments must help in this transition (Brough *et al*, 2003; see also O’Sullivan, 2003:27). In order to reflect upon policy responses to this expectation the focus of discussion now shifts to contemporary migration patterns and associated changes in patterns of identity formation. In an increasingly globalised world, immigration patterns are such that Western governments are faced with providing services to an extremely diverse population with strikingly different cultural and religious practices and new forms of transnational identity.

According to Stephen Castles, the emergence of mass communications and simplified international travel itineraries has created a situation in which the ‘settler model’ of migration (where new immigrants would move permanently to another country and would gradually be assimilated into mainstream society) has been transcended by the

‘temporary migration model’ (where migrant workers re-locate into a particular country, but maintain ties with their countries of origin). This had led to the development of ‘new modes of migrant belonging’ through the formation of ‘transnational communities’ that consist of groups ‘whose identity is not primarily based on attachment to a specific territory’, but rather a combination of several identity orientations. This development represents a ‘powerful challenge to traditional ideas of nation-state building’ and personal identity (Castles, 2002:1143-1153; see also Castles, 2004; Vertovec, 2004; Lubeck, 2002; and Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000:2).

For Castles, these changes prompt a range of tensions at national, cultural and local levels. For example, there is a ‘feeling of uncertainty and loss, arising from the swamping of distinctive cultural practices and forms by a commodified international culture’. States and territories are perceived to be threatened by the arrival of ‘imported ethnic cultures’ that are not willing to forfeit their ‘languages, folklore, cultural practices and religions’ by choosing to assimilate fully into the dominant cultural structure. Additionally, at the level of interpersonal relationships, increasingly prominent manifestations of ethnic distinction help to forge a contrasting sense of solidarity amongst those individuals comprising the dominant, national grouping (Castles, 1996:40-41).

Transnational migration, as outlined by Castles, has fostered a type of membership within ethnic diasporas defined by a ‘sense of difference, marginality and displaced belonging’, whereby migrants retain ties to their old *and* new homelands simultaneously (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000:10). Consequently, migrants are increasingly asserting their right to retain their cultural identity and to enjoy freedom of religious practice in their host countries. In this context, social tensions and cohesions start to reflect the meanings attached to citizenship - whether it is prescribed by the state or whether migrants retain their ‘distinctive cultural personalities’ in its expression (O’Sullivan, 2003:28).

Assessments about the success of settlement processes reflect these changes. Whereas settlement was previously assessed in terms of how well a migrant group had assimilated into the dominant culture, it is now assessed according to whether or not migrants have been able to maintain their own cultural identities within the context of the dominant culture (Dunn, 2001). Rather than assuming that a migrant’s identity must be subsumed within that of the host country, this view of multicultural integration accepts, at least in theory, that ‘immigrants would continue to speak their own languages and would try to pass on to their children a sense of pride in their origins’. Significantly, this perspective attaches value to the retention of diverse identities (Jupp, 2001:261).

Dunn outlines several specific *advantages* of fostering areas of ethnic concentration. These include the more likely generation of intra-ethnic networks and the more efficient targeting of cultural and support organisations in these areas. Such networks and organisations assist in the integration process and result from a critical mass of people who require similar services. When considered from this perspective, such areas can be classified as a particular *activity-space concentration* within a particular geographical area, rather than more negative associations with ethnic concentrations as threatening to social cohesion within the broader community (Dunn, 1998:518-520).



These developments have led to new understandings of the term 'diaspora'. The term diaspora can be understood as a key component of contemporary debates around immigration and migrant identification, especially as it challenges traditional assumptions 'about the national boundedness of the ethnic experience' (Sreberny, 2000). Sinclair and Cunningham support this claim, arguing that 'globalisation presents more and more people with the experience of difference and displacement', thus implying that the idea of diaspora is no longer a *metaphor*, but rather the 'archetype for the kind of cultural adaptiveness which our era demands' (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000:15).

In effect, the experience of transnational migration has created an environment whereby ethnic communities now 'transcend national borders', and migrants no longer automatically feel the need to choose one place and identity over the other exclusively (Dunn & Geeraert, 2003). These developments are not universally viewed as positive. What Dunn describes as *activity-space concentrations* have been characterised by others as ghettos and enclaves and as some of the foremost threats to the attainment of social cohesion (Levy, 2000; see also Glaser *et al*, 2003:525). Likewise, Fennema discusses the polarising effect of this type of social development. If ethnic organisations and/ or small businesses interact exclusively with other individuals from the same background and rarely move outside the context of the ethnic community, then he contends that a 'completely fragmented but egalitarian society of ethnic communities' will develop in which democratic forms of governance would be seriously challenged by individual ethnic identification patterns (Fennema, 2004; see also Webster, 2003). The danger associated with this type of activity is that what may begin as a positive form of self-promotion and identification can become the foundation of social exclusion and discrimination.

#### **2.1.4 Islamic Identity in the Context of Western Society**

Frequent and high volume transnational migration is one of the key processes associated with globalisation. Migrants who struggle with how to combine aspects of their cultural and religious identities with that of their host country are thus involved at an intimate individual and community level with broader globalised trends. For this reason, to cite Anthony Giddens, globalisation cannot be perceived as only related to big business and politics, or alternatively to that which is 'out there, remote and far away from the individual'. Rather, globalisation is a phenomenon with the power to influence the 'intimate and personal aspects' an individual's life, whatever their political, religious and/ or cultural orientation (Giddens, 2002:12).

Perceived tensions between Islamic practices and host societies are at the heart of these personal negotiations of globalisation. As explained by Gole, for Muslims, Islamic principles are a 'source of orientation' from which they strive to live as moral citizens in an increasingly globalised world (Gole, 2003; see also Lum *et al*, 2005). As described by Al Sayyad, Muslim migrants in Western countries are faced with the need to 'negotiate new identities.' This is a complex situation where they resist being treated as an 'outsider' and excluded from society, but at the same time also resist the full adoption of Western practices and ideals that they may see as contradictory to their beliefs (AlSayyad, 2002:9; see also Yasmeen, 2005:165-166; Tibi, 2002:41-42; Khan, 2002:8-14; and Monshipouri & Motameini, 2000:709).

This is particularly true, as highlighted by Esposito, when considering Arab and Muslim individuals who live 'as a minority in a dominant [Western] culture that is often ignorant about Islam or even hostile to it', where the experiences of 'marginalisation, alienation, and powerlessness', especially since 9/11, has prompted a 'struggle with the relationship of faith to national identity' (Esposito, 2002:172-174). A similar conclusion is drawn by Ramsey, who argues that under these conditions, Muslims often come to perceive themselves as unwelcome outsiders, which causes some to cling 'all the more determinedly to their faith and its customary and comforting rituals' (Ramsey, 2003).

Thus implied is that the experience of globalisation, as defined by large-scale transnational migration, can lead to 'confrontation over identity issues' (Al Sayyad, 2002:9), both at the individual level and in the community. At the individual level, Muslims must find a way to live in a Western society, while at the same time remain true to their Islamic faith. Migrant identity, if viewed from this perspective, cannot be viewed as either fixed or singular. It is instead multifaceted and influenced by many competing factors such as religion *and* country/community factors. Migrant identity formation is defined through 'inscription,' where migrants are viewed through the lens of the dominant culture, and 'ascription,' where migrants takes steps to create a unique identity that contains traces of their cultural background and religious orientation, as well as elements of mainstream practice and belief (Luke & Luke, 2000:45-48).

In and of itself, the formation of hybrid identities is not problematic as it is an inherently personal experience and has its primary impact on a particular person. The problem, however, is that an adherence to a particular set of principles, such as that associated with Islam, can be interpreted by others as confronting and challenging to mainstream culture (Gole, 2003).

Debates about the virtues of hybrid identities are affected by a range of assumptions about the nature of Islam and Muslims, by 'stereotypical assumptions and pronouncements regarding the status of women in Islam, arranged marriages, or the inherently fanatical, violent and irrational tendencies of Muslim leaders and their followers' (Werbner, 2000:309). They are affected by assumptions that Muslims represent a 'culturally alien presence' that has the potential to disrupt existing patterns of social cohesion (Werbner, 2000:309; see also Humphrey, 2005:133). As argued by Dunn *et al* (2004:410-411):

*'Ethnic minorities are no longer viewed as inferior; rather they are differentiated as threats to 'social cohesion' and 'national unity' that is to the cultural values and integrity of the dominant (Anglo-Celtic) host society'.*

This is particularly the case after the London subway bombings. For Werbner the aftermath of these events reflect the belief that 'alien qualities and attributes have come to be implanted in the Western body itself', and are no longer just an issue of border control and/or immigration (Werbner, 2000:309). As a result of international incidents of terrorism, the idea of cultural diversity has come under debate, especially with regard to which ethnic practices can be unproblematically confined to the personal realm, and which pose a potential threat to society. These debates raise the further question of the sustainability of multiculturalism in this context.

## 2.2 Social Exclusion and Discrimination: Migrant Experiences

### 2.2.1 Social Exclusion

The process of globalisation contains contradictory elements. From one perspective, increased levels of migration 'exemplify how globalisation represents a long-term historical trend toward the integration of economies, peoples, and cultures regardless of national boundaries' (Lubeck, 2002:69). The advantages of this process, however, are challenged by the experience of many migrants when they arrive in a new country, especially those that were forced by circumstances beyond their control into making such a move in the first place. Rather than being welcomed into the new society, many migrants are once again faced with exclusion because they are perceived as different to the mainstream and therefore undesirable. In the case of Muslim migrants, they are now often characterised as the violent and dangerous 'other'. This experience is exacerbated as the Australian government shifts from 'a discourse of full participation under multiculturalism' to a risk focused approach whereby Muslims are expected to integrate fully or risk being 'kept under surveillance and controlled' (Humphrey, 2005:134, 145).

Bryan Turner also takes a pessimistic stance when he identifies how the media has characterised Muslims as:

*'A treacherous and primitive gene pool...[by] demonising their religion and cultural practices, refusing our commonality with them as human beings, accepting their placement in detention centres, and turning a blind eye to breaches of their civil liberties in the name of a spurious national emergency'.*

The conclusion drawn by Turner is that in Australia specifically and the West more generally, a discourse has emerged of closed national citizenship, whereby those considered outside the majority are regarded as 'destructive and subversive' (Turner, 2003:412-415; see also Mansouri, 2005:155). Such negative attitudes have a proportional effect on minority groups' experience of social inclusion/ exclusion and citizenship.

At the most basic level, citizenship refers to the ability to participate freely in the political process of an individual's country of residence. However, like many other sociological terms, this term is highly contested. The often-indiscriminate uses of *citizenship* and *social exclusion*, as terms, make it difficult to ascertain 'what people are being excluded from' (Marsh, 2004:7). They are also fluid terms where the associated meaning has been transformed over time.

Whereas the more traditional definitions designate unemployment and poverty as the main forms of social exclusion, newer conceptualisations show this to have been an oversimplification of the issues involved. As explored by Atkinson and Davoudi, clear distinctions must be made between poverty and social exclusion, since poverty is a 'static concept, an outcome rather than a dynamic process' that is primarily associated with income distribution, or the lack thereof. Social exclusion, by contrast, is a 'comprehensive, multidimensional and dynamic process' that constantly adjusts and re-adjusts to changing social conditions. Poverty, rather than epitomising social exclusion, is but one form thereof (Atkinson & Davoudi, 2000).

Most analysts accept the multi-dimensional approach to social exclusion. Anthony Richmond (2002:40), for example, distinguishes between the *four dimensions* of social exclusion, including:

- an individual's exclusion from 'adequate income or resources';
- labour-market exclusion;
- service exclusion; and
- exclusion from social relations.

Arthurson and Jacobs (2004) draw a similar conclusion, arguing that debates over social inclusion/exclusion revolve around an individual's access to resources, social networks and supports, democratic decision-making and culturally and linguistically appropriate institutional practices. For Vasta, social exclusion is most obvious in relation to citizenship rights and/ or duties, which includes the 'denial of social justice and institutional regulation' and the inability to participate in decision-making processes (Vasta, 2004; see also Babacan, 2006).

Rather than focusing primarily on social exclusion, Kevin Dunn approaches the subject from the perspective of active citizenship. Citing Waitt *et al*, Dunn outlines the five forms of participation that must exist, before citizenship can be associated with social justice:

- unfettered access to government services to prevent marginalisation,
- meaningful participation to prevent powerlessness,
- positive constructions of identity to fight cultural imperialism,
- legal sanctions against exploitation,
- state protection against violence.

For Dunn, citizenship represents a 'socially constructed phenomenon' defined and differentiated by established patterns of influence and power in society that is exclusionary by nature (Dunn, 2001a; see also Mansouri, 2005:153), and when reduced to its essentials, it 'refers to the ability of individuals to exercise their individual capacities and pursue collective endeavour'. Thus implied is that social inclusion and exclusion can be experienced simultaneously by different types of citizens since the rights of citizenship are often not distributed evenly in society (Dunn, 2003; see also Thompson & Dunn, 2002; and Dunn, 2001b:35). Saskia Sassen (2004) agrees and presents the political process and experience as one defined by a 'dynamic interaction' between social inclusion and social exclusion.

In this respect Muslim minority groups in Australia have had their personal 'integrity and loyalty as citizens' questioned (Humphrey, 2005:135). If Muslims indeed pose a threat from within, so the argument goes, then their activities should be monitored for any trace of subversion and dealt with accordingly. In this environment, measures taken against religious or other freedoms of Muslim groups is not viewed as a violation of human rights, but as necessary to protect Australian society and its citizens. As concluded by Humphrey, 'the risk perspective of the war on terrorism is a recipe for alienation and division' (Humphrey, 2005:145).

## **2.2.2 Racial Discrimination and New Forms of Racism**

Two forms of racial discrimination are currently recognised: direct and indirect. Direct forms of racial discrimination, as defined on HREOC's homepage, are

incidents where a person is 'treated less fairly because of their race, colour, descent, national origin or ethnic origin' (see also Helly, 2004). These types of discrimination manifest in 'many guises'. For example, they not only include situations where a particular minority group suffers from increased unemployment rates, but also those where individuals that are able to find work are socially restricted to low-status jobs that involve significantly lower pay rates. This particular problem is exacerbated when many migrants find that the qualifications they obtained overseas are not officially recognised in their new host country (Humphrey, 2005:137; Collins, 1996).

Other forms of direct discrimination range from a person being denied housing because of his/her ethnic background to someone not having access to the political process and to key decision-making mechanisms because they do not speak English well (Stalker, 2001:132). Educational contexts and sporting venues are also known for racial discrimination, specifically because of the increased 'cross-cultural contact' in those spheres (Dunn et al, 2003).

Indirect forms of racial discrimination, by contrast, occur when people are indirectly affected by policies (whether in government or in the workplace) that while formulated to treat everyone involved with equity, produce in reality an 'unfair effect on more people of a particular race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin than others' (HREOC homepage). With a specific focus on Arab and Muslim communities, Helly highlights how systemic discrimination, such as a government's open profiling of Muslim migrants in the name of increased security measures, can prompt other types of related unfair practices, such as the choice to not hire someone because of their ethnic and/or cultural background, or requiring additional employment qualifications from those issued from this person's country of origin (Helly, 2004). Indirect discrimination also includes cases where employment has been denied or terminated because of the perception that migrant workers 'have inherent problems of communication and training'. This is then exacerbated by the fact that there are few programs specifically designed to help these individuals enter or re-enter the workforce once they have been unemployed for a period of time (Collins, 1996).

More recently, national laws relating to the current security context have inadvertently had a negative impact on Australian Muslims in almost every aspect of their lives. Despite official statements that national security debates are 'non-religious, non-ethnic and non-racist' in character, their focus has remained on Muslim communities in Western society (Saikal, 2005:14).

HREOC outline a number of concerns held by Arab and Muslim Australians in the context of new security measures in Australia. The concerns range from the lack of culturally relevant education at both the secondary and tertiary levels, to the problematic approach of the media to the various Muslim minority groups, the provision of adequate legal protection from discrimination, and a scepticism regarding equitable law enforcement practices in relation to minority groups (HREOC, 2004). This is in addition to more daily concerns such as finding adequate housing and finding employment, or alternatively, the perception that the Australian government does not recognise or acknowledge how important it is to respect cultural identity and how that impacts on the realisation of a genuine sense of belonging amongst minority groups (Mansouri, 2005:152).

Both forms of discrimination, direct and indirect, are taken seriously in Australia. To combat such developments, the Australian Government passed legislation including the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA) in 1975, which made racial discrimination

unlawful throughout Australia and covered discrimination in areas such as employment, renting or buying property, the provision of goods and services, accessing public places and in advertising.

In 1995, the RDA was extended through the Racial Hatred Act (RHA), which made it possible for people to make official complaints about racially offensive or abusive behaviour. The objective was to find a balance between an individual's right to freedom of speech, while at the same time guaranteeing the right of others to enjoy freedom from vilification. These acts have in recent times been expanded to include provisions against discrimination directed against a person's religious affiliation, which has become a key form of discrimination in the current security dominated environment in Australia (Lum *et al*, 2005:10).

The problem is that while legislation and legal policies change frequently, genuine social transformation and attitudinal change is an involved process that takes a longer period to consolidate. Mellor highlights that the policy changes involved in the move from 'white Australia' to multiculturalism were not enough to eradicate 'racist attitudes, beliefs and actions' directed at the different ethnic minorities in Australia (Mellor, 2004). If genuine change is to occur, it takes more than national policies and legal dictates. Change must begin at the grass-roots level, become consolidated at the level of local governance, and also be enshrined in federal legislation.

Attitudinal shifts are further complicated in the current atmosphere because of changes in social perceptions about what racism actually is. As argued by Dunn *et al*, 'exclusion and exploitation based on racist criteria are as widespread and serious as ever [in Australia] – though they may have changed in form' (Dunn *et al*, 2003). This statement requires unpacking. One of the possible consequences of legislation such as the RDA the RHA, for example, is the perception that ethnic minorities are introducing 'special difficulties' into the community, or that they are being allowed to enjoy 'special treatment' from the government that is not deserved (Dunn *et al*, 2001).

In many countries where racism has been legally and socially condemned for a period of time, many people may no longer consider themselves to be racist. The formal condemnation of racism may suggest that equality has been sufficiently ensured and that all segments of society now have equal access to social resources and employment. However, other more indirect forms of racism have emerged in this context which are not always recognised *as* racism. As concluded by Collins, contemporary forms of racism are characterised by the element of denial, as it is 'deemed as an unacceptable – and in Australia's case unlawful – way to behave' (Collins, 1996:75).

Dovidio and Gaertner explore this idea further, arguing that: '[a]ccording to the aversive racism perspective, many people who consciously and sincerely support egalitarian principles and believe themselves to be non-prejudiced ...unconsciously harbour negative feelings and beliefs' about certain minority groups (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996). Rather than physically assaulting individuals from minority groups, people simply avoid contact with them, for example.

From this perspective, people are now unlikely to engage in the 'traditional, old-fashioned forms of racism', such as those that included overt confrontational behaviour. They may employ avoidance tactics 'rather than intentionally destructive or hostile behaviour'. While Dovidio and Gaertner focus on African Americans their theory is equally applicable to other cases of racial and/or ethnic bias with similar

experiences recounted by Muslim Australians in the HREOC report. Helly draws a similar conclusion and argues that while cases of physical violence still occur, 'hostile acts targeting Muslims are more likely to take the form of insults, threats, and attacks against places of worship than acts of assault and battery or physical aggression' (Helly, 2004).

Koopmans and Statham address this issue, but from a slightly different perspective. According to their analysis, social exclusion and racism is now dominated by debates over 'biases against cultural difference', especially those that stem from the perception that recent transnational migration patterns have effectively strained 'both the migrant's adaptive capabilities and the host society's integrative capacities'. Thus implied is that contemporary conceptions of exclusion are no longer tied exclusively to socio-economic inequality or the lack of citizenship rights (Koopmans & Statham, 1999).

Dunn *et al* highlight the results of a national survey whereby many respondents in the Sydney area reported the following incidents of inter-cultural tension:

- verbal abuse of ethnic minorities,
- vandalising of places of worship,
- letters of complaint to council about neighbourhood changes to accommodate ethnically-based needs,
- crime linked to youth from minority ethnic groups,
- intercultural feuds and intercultural clashes.

As a result of this type of environment, minority groups may be subjected to the experience of social exclusion, if not overt forms of racism. Through these experiences, the value of citizenship and a sense of belonging for these individuals are undermined and degraded (Dunn *et al*, 2001).

Finally, social exclusion and racial biases, whether direct or indirect in form, also develop in response to negative media coverage of the activities of minority groups. Because the media provide a primary source of information to the public about various migrant groups it can wittingly or unwittingly serve to reinforce the mistreatment of and discrimination against them. For example, a chain of events can follow from media generalisations about minority groups and criminal behaviour on the basis of the actions of particular individuals' who are members of the group. These projections influence public opinion and inform the decisions of prominent urban managers, including town planners, housing officers, elected councillors or building inspectors (Dunn & Mahtani, 2001:163-164). As a result of these generalisations minority groups may then be denied social services ranging from fair and equitable law enforcement to the provision of adequate housing or employment (Dunn *et al*, 2003).

### **2.3 Approaches to Diversity: The Role of Local Government**

A diverse range of views on the credibility of multiculturalism along with increasingly negative perceptions and attitudes towards Muslim Australians create specific challenges for policy makers in regard to cultural and religious diversity. As questioned by Dunn (2001b:35), how can the various levels of the Australian Government ensure that people enjoy their rights as members of a diverse polity

without generating racial bias in the community? How can cultural diversity be approached from a policy perspective so as to value the unique cultural and linguistic mix that has become commonplace in Australia? And finally, how are people encouraged to move past a position of tolerance for minority groups to a position of dialogue?

Thompson and Dunn (2002) hold that if citizenship is to provide equity to all cultural groups, it must recognise that:

- a 'diverse citizenry demands a diverse polity'; and
- this type of polity must include 'varied means by which citizens can actively participate' in the overarching political process.

It is now widely recognised that social integration and cohesion is a process that relies on the exchange of ideas between the dominant culture and each of the newly created ethnic groups in the communities in which they live (Home Office, 2004:3-5). To be successful, this requires the development of a mutual dialogue between the newer migrant groups and the more established groups, as well as the mainstream groups in society (Home Office, 2003:4). It also requires that policies be formulated to encourage different groups in society to move beyond tolerance for one another and to learn to accept other groups for their diversity and the benefit this brings to the community.

For Burnett, such an expectation is problematic, since even the term social or community cohesion is exclusionary by nature. When tension exists in a community, it is often attributed to those individuals thought to be 'in diametric opposition' to the mainstream community and threatening to the accepted notions of what constitutes national identity'. The primary obstacle to this is that many of the existing national and local policies focus on how to help (or force) ethnic communities to conform to existing social norms, rather than on how to incorporate them into society and truly celebrating cultural diversity. Burnett (2004:1) outlines the following dichotomous relationship:

'Rather than the state having an obligation to cater for all its citizens, that obligation is now contingent upon the reworking and realignment of individual identities and value systems, and the shedding of responsibilities from government on to communities themselves'.

This statement provides a context for the responsibility of local community leaders and local government to foster social cohesion through intercultural understanding in their own communities. The objective is to expose the prevailing system, whereby 'people from different ethnic backgrounds live largely separated from one another', as essentially untenable (Oldham Independent Review, 2001). Such an approach is directed at bringing diverse groups of people together in dialogue rather than encouraging conformity to a particular model of citizenship.

The first step in this direction is to formulate guidelines at all levels of government that aim at building a stronger sense of social cohesion. This requires an examination of existing policies and the formulation of strategic plans to 'to promote better community cohesion, based on shared community values and a celebration of diversity' (Local Government Association, 2002; see also Cantle, 2001).



### 2.3.1 A new role for local government

Local government as the level of government closest to the community has a strategic advantage in addressing issues of intercultural harmony and social cohesion. In direct contrast to the traditional view that the council is responsible for ‘roads, rates and rubbish,’ there is an increasing perception that councils represent the level of government with the highest capacity to create links between the people and all other levels of government in Australia (*Diversity Policy*, Darebin City Council, 2003). From this perspective, the role of the State Government is to act as a regulatory body to ensure that local councils are working towards the same ends and not working against each other.

Local government, if it is to remain effective, must focus on the local community and its changing and often complex needs. To do this councils must continually assess the following questions and related issues:

- How does the community operate and what makes it unique?
- What are the aspirations of the whole community?
- What are the specific needs of the community?
- What barriers exist that prevent people from full participation in the community and impede equal access to services?

(*ICMA International Best Practices 2004*, Darebin City Council)

At the most basic level, community leaders and council must ensure that their particular council has the capacity to ‘serve and represent a diverse community’, but more importantly to promote and ensure increasing levels of social inclusion and intercultural harmony for the various minority groups within the surrounding area (*Diversity Policy*, Darebin City Council, 2003). To foster genuine social change and enhance social harmony, the first step is for council and community leaders to formulate a tangible *community strategy* that outlines what must be done to achieve the types of social change envisioned by their constituents (Local Government Association, 2002; see also Cattle, 2001).

In conjunction with a commitment to build an organisational competency in relation to cultural diversity, all policies must be formulated to reflect the fact that while financial matters influence the bottom line of council activities, cultural and linguistic mandates create other points of reference. Through a focus on diversity local governments can improve their efficiency in relation to the following factors (taken from *ICMA International Best Practices 2004*, Darebin City Council):

- service excellence,
- human productivity,
- competitive advantage,
- meaningful intercultural community relations.

To achieve these ends, Thompson recommends that councils across Australia should accept a ‘responsibility to institute a local politics of inclusive citizenship and social justice (Thompson, 1998). Consequently, and in response to the increasingly levels of cultural diversity in Australia, councils must continue to formulate increasingly comprehensive multicultural policies.

Rather than just focusing on the cultural forms of diversity found in a particular locality, government institutions and policies must ‘identify and abandon discriminatory and iniquitous practices in the provision of services and facilities’

(Thompson & Dunn, 2002). They must reflect the existence of a multicultural and 'diverse citizenry', which means that they must include (Dunn *et al*, 2001):

- more inclusive official portrayals of collective identity,
- material encouragement of more culturally diverse political representation,
- moving beyond the mere eradication or management of cultural diversity by recasting the local state through the expansion of citizenship,
- council vision statements that reflect the dynamics of local diversity, and recognise the extent to which different cultural groups should be accepted as part of the local citizenry,
- the provision of local and regional portrayals, which are definitionally diverse, and not consumed with a restrictive unitariness or sameness,
- antiracism policies, not pronouncements offering equal opportunities alone,
- the expansion of the definition of locality or local communities to represent a diverse and dynamic citizenry.

But how is this managed in practice? To ensure equity of participation for diverse groups, the following would be needed (Thompson & Dunn, 2002):

- the pursuit of radical democratic citizenship in local government through the development of language systems that cater for a linguistically diverse and uneven citizenry,
- the expansion of services to include even those who have no knowledge of available services, or who experience other barriers to access.

The first step is for local government to eradicate the most basic barriers to services and participation. Key to this process is providing all relevant information in different languages to cater to the different groups in society (Dunn *et al*, 2001a). If participation is to be increased, residents must be aware of the services to which they are entitled and must be able to access them.

This type of development is particularly important in Australia, where most regional areas include visible NESB and/or indigenous communities, all urban areas host a proportional levels of migrant communities, and 'every local government area in metropolitan Melbourne and Sydney have a significant level of cultural diversity' (Thompson, 1998).

Two other attitudinal shifts must happen, if multicultural policies are to be effective. Firstly, multicultural policies cannot remain peripheral to the 'core functions' of roads, rates and rubbish but must be holistically integrated into the organisation's vision and mission. Rather than accepting responsibility for the welfare and benefit of all their constituents, local governments have had a tendency to retain a narrow definition of who should be accorded full citizenship rights and duties, and who should not (Dunn *et al*, 2001). Even with reports of serious inter-ethnic conflicts, local politicians either refrain from implementing 'proactive community relations policies' (Dunn *et al*, 2001), or simply do not have adequate funds to address such complex issues in the longer-term (Dunn *et al*, 2001a).

Also important is for local responses to cultural cleavages and social exclusion to be presented, and ultimately perceived by both Council and the community as an 'ongoing process' that will continue on a long-term basis (Dunn & Thompson, 1998). To this end, the various policies on racial vilification must be taken more seriously

overall and not dismissed as an example of political correctness that can be politely ignored (Thompson & Dunn, 2002:265). For Dunn *et al*, this is of primary importance since Australian laws on vilification and discrimination have traditionally remained weak and/or extremely unwieldy. The associated legal mandates are moreover limited. Social behaviour is often only marginally affected and the rules put into the legislation are ‘often merely symbolic gestures’ that achieve very little (Dunn *et al*, 2003).

### **2.3.2 Policy direction on diversity**

Over the past decade, a new approach has been adopted in Australia that is based on the business principles associated with customising services to cater for the different needs of different consumers. This approach resulted in several pieces of legislation. In 1998, the federal, state and local governments adopted the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*, which was meant to do just that. According to the Charter, council services must be committed to the following seven principles: access, equity, communication, responsiveness, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. The result of this was that councils were given the responsibility to ensure that government services are not based on discriminatory practices, that they are administered on the basis of ‘fair treatment of clients’, that they are available to ‘everyone who is entitled to them’, and that all groups in the community know about and understand what they are entitled to have.

The Charter also formulated suggestions and ‘practical strategies’ to help councils achieve success in each of the seven categories. To improve access, for example, the Charter highlights the need for councils to recognise that a ‘commitment to quality client services’ must include sensitivity to such issues as the understanding that certain clients will encounter different levels and forms of discrimination in the community (i.e. a disabled Aboriginal woman faces triple discrimination in society). To achieve equity, local councils are therefore advised to recognise that the people in their constituency ‘have different opportunities, education, skills and needs’ that require different forms of government attention. Government agencies are charged to be flexible enough to respond to the feedback provided through regularly conducted public consultations with disadvantaged groups in society, and organised enough to provide clear accounts of how services have been provided (*Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*, 1998:8).

The following points contrast the relative strengths of the revised objectives of the Charter against the limitations of the Access and Equity model that preceded it (*Darebin’s Access and Equity Evaluation*, Audit Report, 1999):

- Whereas the top-down goals associated with the Access and Equity approach to service provision have been criticised for its vague, bureaucratic nature, the Charter has a bottom-up strategy with a ‘clear client focus’.
- Whereas the Access and Equity approach to service provision was characterised by uniform, generic services, the Charter emphasises ‘customised, flexible, user-responsive service’.
- Whereas the multicultural dimension of the Access and Equity approach was regarded as ‘an additional burden’ to service provision, the Charter offers ‘an orientation to professional, effective and efficient service’.

- Whereas the Access and Equity approach regarded its multicultural dimension as ‘a perfunctory numbers game’, the Charter formulates a ‘pragmatic focus’ on the needs of individual clients in service provision.

While Dunn *et al* designate the ‘celebration of cultural diversity and support for the expression and maintenance of minority cultures...[as] legitimate community relations strategies’, the gradual eradication of racial discrimination requires government interventions that address those remedial social problems that exacerbate interethnic tension, especially at the local level (Dunn *et al*, 2001). To change these types of attitudes, government policies and media coverage of ethnic minorities should instead remain flexible enough to accommodate national identity as ‘diverse and open to reassessment’ (Dunn, 1998).

A recent step in this direction was taken by the Victorian State Government with the 2004 *Multicultural Victoria Act* (MVA), which was the ‘first legislative instrument in Victoria that enshrines the principles of multiculturalism in law, in addition to requiring government departments to report annually to the Minister of Multicultural Affairs on their achievements and forward plans in the multicultural arena’. Through this legislation, Victoria’s culturally and linguistically diverse population was both recognised and enshrined in law. More importantly, however, was the fact that Victoria was given a specific, multicultural direction for all councils to follow which was flexible enough to adjust according to their communities unique needs and concerns.

The MVA also incorporated the *Victorian Multicultural Commission Act* into the State Government’s response to multicultural needs and challenges through the creation of the Victorian Multicultural Commission. The Commission’s objectives are as follows:

- to promote full participation by Victoria’s culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in the social, cultural, economic and political life of Victoria,
- to promote access by Victoria’s CALD communities to services made available by governments and other bodies,
- to encourage Victoria’s CALD communities to retain and express their social identity and cultural inheritance,
- to promote co-operation between bodies concerned with multicultural affairs,
- to promote unity among Victoria’s CALD communities, and
- to promote a better understand within Victoria of Victoria’s CALD communities.

When all these initiatives are combined, three important steps are made towards a more inclusive form of local government. Firstly, there is demonstrated recognition on the part of the Federal Government that cultural diversity is important and requires a systematic policy approach. Secondly, it is further recognised that different social groups have different needs and concerns that must be catered for according to their unique set of circumstances. Thirdly, the onus for change is not put on one group alone, but is applied to both migrant *and* mainstream groups. This outlines a two-way line of communication that is critical to the success of multicultural policies in Australia.

### **2.3.3 The Challenge of Respecting Difference**

One of the first multicultural initiatives designed to respond to the challenge of respecting difference was to attempt to introduce mainstream society to the different traditions of the various ethnic minorities. To do this, cultural difference has been celebrated through events such as food fairs, folk dancing festivals, street festivals and community arts exhibitions (Dunn *et al*, 2001). The idea behind these events is to bring people together in a non-threatening environment so that they can be exposed to diversified groups and their cultural practices and preferences. Whilst these events successfully assert the positive aspects of cultural diversity to the wider community, they are 'spatially limited and temporally confined', and often only serve to exoticise what makes another ethnic group different (Vertovec, 1995). Dunn *et al* expand on this, arguing that ethnic-based festivities, rather than enhancing social equality, often 'trivialise cultural difference as well as issues of serious social inequality' (Dunn *et al*, 2001). Major governmental initiatives and policies should be careful not to focus upon celebratory events (ranging from festivals, arts and exhibitions) at the expense of more substantive change.

The assumption that the majority in society should be 'tolerant' of ethnic minorities belies a belief in the superiority of one particular cultural group. From this perspective, 'immigrants and ethnic minorities can keep their own values and cultures, but they cannot complain if this leads to their marginalisation' (Castles, 1996). Dunn and McDonald support this line of argument through their definition of ethnocentrism as the 'unquestioned assumption' that one ethnic group is superior to another, which in turn fosters 'unquestioning acceptance' of racial stereotypes of the various groups in the community (Dunn & McDonald, 2001). What develops is a situation whereby the enacted 'incivilities and vilifications of everyday racism', whether at work or during leisure activities, reinforce the social perception of what constitutes the 'other' in society, with each incident a seeming 're-inscription to a long-standing process of cultural imperialism' (Dunn *et al*, 2003:178)

Radical forms of political and institutional change must be combined with a commitment to re-align state policies to not only reflect the interests of the majority, but those of cultural minorities as well. Rather than emphasising tolerance for ethnic minorities, such activity would aim to bring more equality to the interaction between the different segments of society. After all, even the idea of 'building tolerance' creates the impression that the dominant cultural has the right to 'judge the appropriateness of other' cultural groups in society (Dunn *et al*, 2001). A more useful approach would be to foster policies that aim at social acceptance for difference.

For Husband, ethnic minorities must have a 'moral and legal recognition of their distinctive experience, and their unique location within the state', in particular one that allows ethnic minority groups to pursue whatever interests they wish. However, when citing Wrench and Solomos (1993), Husband highlights a common problem, that while differentiated citizenship is an integral part of multiculturalism, there is a tendency to tolerate cultural difference as long as it remains within the private domain of the home, and not in the public domain (Husband, 2000). This again skirts the differences between tolerance and acceptance.

The overarching change process *must* involve all members of the local community. If existing problems are to be assessed accurately, and ultimately overcome, the people of the community must become actively involved in the decision making process. They must feel they have a stake in the outcomes of these policies. Even more

important, however, is to galvanise the community and involve them in the change process itself. Laws and government policies, to reiterate, only work in practice if they are accepted and acted upon by the people most closely involved. Social cohesion must be 'developed and owned by all local agencies and organisations' (Local Government Association, 2002; see also Cattle, 2001). Interaction between groups cannot be dictated nor orchestrated by government initiatives but 'is something that communities must achieve for themselves'. However local government has the critical role of 'initiating and driving change at the local level' (Denham, 2001; see also Home Office, 2004). These changes must then be supported by State and Federal governments, to ensure that everyone is working towards the same goal and understands what is at stake.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The key questions with which this chapter began can now be addressed in terms of the literature survey.

*(1): Is multiculturalism, as a policy, is losing credibility in Australia?*

Whilst not under direct threat, multiculturalism has been challenged in recent times and does not maintain universal credibility. This is not to deny the strong level of support that also exists for multiculturalism. However this literature survey suggests that if multiculturalism is to continue to provide a meaningful and workable framework for managing cultural diversity in Australia then criticisms and negative perceptions must be addressed in new ways by policy makers.

Multiculturalism has become the focus of strong media criticisms with some commentators suggesting that a connection exists between multicultural tolerance and the radicalisation of Muslim minorities in ways that present a threat to Australian society.

Multicultural policies have also been criticised from a very different perspective. For some, current governmental rhetoric and policy fails to live up to the spirit in which the concept of multiculturalism was first envisaged. For these commentators official multicultural policy works in practice to favour certain approved forms of culture and behaviour and to present others as inappropriate and unacceptable. The effect, they argue, is to indirectly condone discrimination against Muslim minorities.

Between these two extremes, there remains disagreement about what multiculturalism means in practice. Support for multiculturalism is tempered by a continued expectation that migrant groups should integrate into mainstream society. There is also disagreement over which cultural traditions impact unproblematically upon the individual and his/her family and which cultural traditions represent a threat to community cohesion. In addition, there is disagreement about how far the government can and should dictate whether certain practices are acceptable or not.

*(2): Has the level of discrimination against Muslim groups and communities in Australia increased in response to recent international events?*

The literature supports the view that Muslim minorities in Australia have experienced an increase in levels of discrimination in response to specific terrorist attacks and the 'War on Terror'. Media and policy views which are directly or indirectly hostile to Muslim minorities have the potential to influence a population characterised by heightened anxieties and feelings of insecurity in the context of the current international security environment.

It is important to note that discrimination may be experienced in direct or indirect ways. More traditional forms of racism were openly confrontational and easily quantifiable. Likewise, forms of social exclusion traditionally recognised were determined by poverty indexes. In the current context racism and discrimination have become socially unacceptable and people are generally more likely to hide or be unconscious of racist or discriminatory behaviour. Newer forms of exclusion and racism may well take the form of avoidance tactics rather than overtly hostile behaviour, or may target property (mosques for example) rather than people. These types of actions are more difficult to detect and therefore more difficult to control.

*(3): Is local government the most appropriate vehicle to address intercultural understanding in the community?*

A wide range of literature supports the view that local government is the most appropriate vehicle to address intercultural understanding in the community. Dunn *et al* (2001a) outline the responsibilities that have been shifted to local governments in Australia in the push to diversify previously centralised services. According to their argument:

*'...Multiculturalism in local government must include the cultural festivals and language systems, but it should also encompass a remaking of governance, such that citizenship is expanded. Multicultural policies which expand access, which involve citizens in programme development, which rewrite the meaning of the locality, are those which advance a local politics of difference'.*

Through different policies and initiatives, the Australia Government has moved in this direction in that they have adopted the basic business principles related to the customisation of services to cater for the diversified groups in the community. Government initiatives are nevertheless not enough to drive genuine social change. The people of the community must become involved and feel a responsibility for the overarching programs and enter into an interactive relationship with Government.

Both the community and governmental roles have been recognised in Australia and programs have been put in place to encourage these developments, but social change is a longer-term project that must be continuously evaluated to remain vital and effective. It also requires public support and participation. There are many barriers and challenges to overcome. First and foremost, councils must ensure that different groups in the community not only have access to services, but that they know about these services to access them. Translating and interpreting services have been the key to this process, with most council information now provided in the main languages of the community. CALD programs and policies must also be formulated to help bring new voices into the decision-making process of local government.

With these changes, however, there is always the possibility that mainstream groups in the community will perceive these services as catering to undeserving people in the community who represent a collective burden to taxpayers. To overcome these

concerns, a balance must be found. This is the challenge facing local governments in Australia. The question, to cite Dunn again, is how to provide customised services for ethnic groups that respect their cultural and religious background without alienating mainstream groups in society.



## **Chapter 3: Methodological Approach**

This project employs a multidimensional set of research techniques intended to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that facilitate or hinder intercultural harmony and social cohesion in highly globalised societies, now dominated by issues of national security. This broad research agenda influenced the project's narrower focus upon the City of Darebin and the role of local government in promoting greater intercultural harmony.

### **3.1 Conceptual Approach**

The integrative conceptualisation of social development used in this project was premised on selected key theories of globalism (Castels, 2003; Giddens, 1990), social exclusion (Turner, 2004; Ratcliffe, 1998; Somerville, 1998), the formulation of socio-cultural identities by minorities in multicultural societies (Gole, 2003; Saeed, 2003; Husain & O'Brien, 2000), as well as active citizenship. The specific focus was on the identification of the various socio-cultural factors in contemporary politics that have culminated in an increase of discriminatory and/ or racist activity against Muslim minorities in Australia following events such as 9/11 and the Bali bombing.

The significance of this research stems from the fact that much of the research in the area of social harmony, and by association exclusion, focuses *either* on the social issues facilitating the emergence of racial and/ or religious stereotyping in a given society (Hage, 2002; Saeed, 2003; Fox, 1999), *or* on the response of national governments to social problems associated with immigration, official discrimination and/ or racism (Castles, 2002). While addressing important, independent issues, these theories are incomplete. Few studies examine local government initiatives addressing social exclusion in multicultural society. Hence this project seeks to fill this gap in the existing literature.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The project employed a triangulated design using secondary analysis together with the generation of stratified qualitative and quantitative data sets.

After gaining appropriate ethical clearance, the research undertaken was conducted in seven stages:

- Review of existing literature, key themes and debates;
- Survey Development;
- Sample Selection;
- Data Collection;
- Data Analysis; and
- Writing

A sample of the Staff and Community surveys is in Appendix 2 (A & B)

### **3.3 Review of Literature**

In the first stage, the Deakin research team engaged in a review of current themes and debates related to multiculturalism, migration and identity politics in the context of globalisation, theories of racism, discrimination and social exclusion with particular reference to Muslim minorities in Australia.

The literature review also considered state and local government approaches to the reduction of intercultural tension, more specifically the emergence of racism (whether based on cultural and/ or religious differences), against the Muslim Diaspora in Australia.

The review was further strengthened by an analysis of relevant policy documents and recent programs and strategies employed by Darebin City Council to address multicultural issues in the community. These are part of a longer-term policy approach to multiculturalism that has been developed and maintained by Darebin City Council since 1998, as inspired by the 1998 *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*. Gap analysis was undertaken to assess needs within this context. The approach to the needs analysis was informed by the idea of active citizenship and relied on interested parties working collaboratively to identify needs and to devise collective strategies.

The critical analysis generated by this review generated a conceptual and theoretical context for the project and provided a background for the qualitative and quantitative surveys and interviews that followed in the Darebin community.

### **3.4 Darebin Council Staff and Community Surveys**

#### **3.4.1 Survey Development**

This project was designed to employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide insight into the success and/or shortcomings of multicultural policies employed by Darebin City Council.

The primary objective of the surveys was to explore local perceptions about diversity in the Darebin community, the concept of multiculturalism, the role of government in terms of education and funding for multicultural services and general attitudes towards Muslim communities in the Darebin area.

Survey design was supported by statistical data related to the City of Darebin. This was taken from the 2005 City of Darebin Household Survey, which was then compared with data from the 2001 City of Darebin Census Profile from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). This information is provided on the Darebin City Council website ([www.darebin.vic.gov.au](http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au)).

Two surveys were administered:

- an internal survey of Darebin City Council employees,
- an external survey of a stratified sampling of residents in the Darebin community

Both the internal and the external surveys were comprised of a combination of questions eliciting scaled, open-ended, closed and partially-closed responses from each respondent.

Each question type has advantages and limitations as outlined below.

*Scaled Questions:*

Scaled questions include a range of numbers that respondents can choose to indicate how strongly they feel about a particular question, or how often they engage in a particular type of activity. One of the main advantages of using this type of question is that it allows for a direct comparison of results between respondents.

However, as highlighted by Davies (1994), 'results are not automatically more objective simply because they are expressed in terms of numbers or percentages'. Even acknowledging the comparative advantages of this type of questions, scaled questions still require subjective judgements about how a particular numerical answer relates to the question being asked.

*Open-Ended Questions:*

Open-ended questions allow respondents to construct their own answers in their own words. There are several advantages of using open-ended questions. For instance, this type of questions does not pre-empt the range and types of answers that a respondent might give and often generates unanticipated but useful information about the subject.

A negative aspect of open-ended questions is that they are difficult to code and analyse. In addition, some answers may be illegible or completely irrelevant.

*Closed Questions:*

Closed questions offer respondents a limited range of specific choices for a particular question. The advantages and limitations of the closed question mirror those of the open-ended questions, but in reverse. While closed questions are easy to codify and allow simple comparisons between respondents, they often limit the respondent to categories that may or may not be relevant to their experiences.

*Partially Closed Questions:*

Partially closed questions combine elements of both the open-ended and closed question type. With this type of question the respondent is provided with a limited range of potential answers as well as the opportunity to give a different answer to those offered or to elaborate on why they chose particular answers.

The two surveys constructed for this project employed mainly scaled and partially closed questions in order to allow for a comparative perspective. They also used a number of open-ended questions in key locations allowing individual respondents to express identity and organisational-specific information.

### **3.4.2 The (Internal) Darebin Staff Diversity Survey**

This survey was administered in September 2005 by the Performance Support Branch at the Darebin City Council and was made available to all Darebin Council employees.

The survey was deployed both electronically through the intranet and through hard copy. Staff members with access to a computer/intranet filled out the survey electronically while other non-desk based staff members were given an identical hardcopy version. The latter group included employees that work in outdoor areas such as roads and parks in City Service, as well as employees who work in Aged and Disability Services.

There were a total of 262 respondents to the internal survey, which represents approximately 33 percent of the total staff. The largest group of respondents were born in Australia/New Zealand/Oceania (75%) and had worked for the City of Darebin longer than one year but less than five years. The majority of respondents had a university degree (with a combined total of 43.8%). Of the rest, 37.6% had some other form of tertiary certification or training. 13.1% had no further qualification beyond a high school degree.

The majority of Council respondents were female (68.3%) and were aged between 36-45 years of age (33.9%). A significant proportion of Council respondents were aged between 26-35 years of age (24.4%) or between 46-55 years of age (20.8%).

Over half of the Council respondents only speak English (54%), as compared with nearly a quarter who speak a language other than English (27%). When asked about religious affiliation nearly half of Council respondents considered themselves Christian (49%), while slightly more than a third stated that they had no religion (34%). 1.8% of Council respondents were Muslim.

### **3.4.3 The (External) Darebin Community Diversity Survey**

Also in September 2005, Metropolis Research Pty Ltd conducted an external survey based on stratified sampling techniques and using door-to-door, face-to-face interview style methodology. A total of 300 interview-style surveys of 10-15 minutes duration were conducted over a period of four weeks.

The external survey included the same questions on multiculturalism and the perception of Muslim communities in Australia, but differed in the questions about the Darebin City Council. This discrepancy was necessary because Council employees would have different perspectives of and experiences with the Multicultural Affairs Unit (Community Planning and Advocacy Branch) than people in the community who may have little or no direct experience with Council programmes and policies.

Approximately 38 surveys were conducted in each of Darebin's eight precincts to ensure an accurate representation of the community of Darebin.

The majority of community respondents had lived in the City of Darebin for more than five years (with a combined total of 58.4%). 17.7% of Community respondents had lived in the City of Darebin for less than a year.

The majority of Community respondents were professionals (38.4%) followed by people employed as intermediate clerical, sales and services staff (17.9%). Associate

professionals (12.6%) and managers and administrators (10.3%) were also well represented.

The survey obtained an extremely accurate representation of males and females which closely matches census figures, with 45.5% male and 54.5% female respondents.

The majority of Community respondents were between the ages of 21-35 years (35.1%) but were closely followed by people aged between 36-45 years (25.5%) and between 46-60 years (22.5%). Respondents below the age of 20 were under-represented. This reflects the method of conducting surveys in that interviewers asked to speak to an adult in each respondent household. Persons aged 61 years and over were also slightly under-represented.

The majority of Community respondents spoke only English at home (54.4%). 2.9% of respondents indicated that more than one language was spoken at home. Of the remaining respondents, Italian (14.9%) and Greek (7.9%) were the most common languages spoken. This was followed by Arabic (2.4%), Maltese (1.8%) and Tagalog (Filipino) (1.3%). Mandarin and Cantonese represented 1.2% of respondents and Chinese 1.1%. Macedonian and Spanish each represented 1.0% of respondents. All other languages scored under 1.0%.

### **3.4.4 Limitations of the Surveys**

In addition to the advantages and limitations of the types of questions used in the two surveys, other factors provide limitations to the data obtained.

The two surveys provide two different sets of data which cannot always be compared directly for the following reasons:

- The respondents for each survey were gathered in different ways. The staff survey was not representative of staff as a whole but provided all staff with the opportunity to respond. In this respect, the staff survey may possibly be skewed towards people with stronger opinions about the various issues explored in the survey. In contrast the community survey respondents were selected via a random process.
- The staff survey was made up of people currently in the workforce, while the community survey included respondents that were young (i.e. not yet in the workforce), older than those in the workforce (e.g. retired), unemployed persons, people on disability pensions and people doing unpaid work in the home.
- The staff survey included people who live in different parts of Melbourne (e.g. outside the Darebin area), while the community survey was of residents of Darebin.
- In the staff survey, staff working in areas such as Home Care were over-represented while those working in City Services were under-represented. There was also a proportionally higher number of female respondents.
- Both surveys included sensitive questions that sought to reveal an opinion on personal and/or controversial issues. Council employees filled out the survey confidentially on the web or in hardcopy, while community respondents were asked questions face to face. This latter method may have affected survey

results in that the anticipated reaction of the interviewer may have impacted upon the answers provided by community respondents.

Because of imperfect sampling methods the results of the two surveys are not necessarily representative of the Darebin staff or the Darebin community. The results should therefore be viewed with caution and treated only as an indication of existing opinions and debates around the issues of multiculturalism, intercultural harmony and the role of local government in this debate.

### **3.5 In-depth Qualitative Interviews**

In addition to the internal and external quantitative surveys, this project also conducted a number of individual interviews with Council employees, community leaders, including religious leaders and spokespersons of relevant NGOs in Darebin. In addition to these interviews, various local business owners and general community members were interviewed to better understand social attitudes that facilitate or reduce social exclusion and racially motivated discrimination, and the potential for informed policy responses at the local government level.

Twenty-two individual interviews were conducted in the Darebin area over a three month period from October to December 2005 according to four levels of stratification: demographics, connection to Muslim communities, gender and other factors.

The interviewees were targeted firstly according to the *demographics* of the Darebin community:

- The Darebin City Council website stipulates that one in three Darebin residents was born in a non-English speaking country and represent established migrant groups in Australia. Hence seven of the people interviewed or their immediate families were born in a non-English speaking country.
- One in twenty-five residents in Darebin are Aboriginal or Torres Straight Islander. While no Indigenous people responded to our requests for an interview, two of the respondents worked in organisations that served the Indigenous communities in Darebin.
- To represent the aging population in Darebin, with one in five Darebin residents over the age of 60, one of the respondents worked for a local RSL.
- With one in seven Darebin residents earning below the poverty level, two of the respondents worked in a local organisation that catered to people with financial difficulties.

Secondly, because this project examines the experience of the various *Muslim communities* in the Darebin area:

- Four of the respondents were from Muslim communities in the Darebin and surrounding areas. It was anticipated that these individuals could provide insight into local Muslims' experiences of discrimination and social exclusion.

- Four religious leaders were interviewed, including a Muslim religious leader, a Catholic priest, a local minister and a Tamil priest. It was anticipated that religious leaders could provide insight into perceptions of multicultural policies and programs and their successes.
- Two further respondents work in organisations that cater to the Muslim communities in the area. These respondents were sought to provide insight into the needs of Muslim communities in Darebin and to address the issue of funding from state and federal governments.

Thirdly, the *gender* of the respondents was carefully monitored:

- 10 Respondents were female
- 12 Respondents were male

Four *other factors* were considered when targeting interview candidates:

- *Council Employees*: three respondents were Darebin City Council employees to represent those responding to the internal survey.
- *Educators*: the HREOC report targeted the need for culturally relevant education at both the secondary and tertiary levels. For this reason, four respondents were involved in educational facilities including schools and a university. As educators, these respondents provided insight into the challenges of pursuing a culturally relevant curriculum in schools. In addition, they provided information into the experiences of youth in the Darebin community.
- *Non-Government Organisations*: eight respondents were involved in a local non-government organisation in Darebin.
- *Local Businesses*: six respondents were business owners in the Darebin community. As local business owners and service providers in Darebin, it was anticipated that they would have insight into how different policies and programs work in the local community area.

Once potential participants were targeted, they were contacted and asked to participate in the project. Some were contacted by email, others by fax. Others were located by the snowballing effect, where those individuals that had agreed to participate in the project provided contact details for other interested parties. Provided these individuals matched the requirements of this project, they were contacted by email or by fax. All participants were provided a 'plain language statement' that outlined the primary objectives of this project and were guaranteed confidentiality.

During these interviews, respondents were first asked to fill out the same survey as that distributed to the Darebin residents. Then semi-structured interviews were conducted where general topics were introduced by the interviewer, allowing the respondent to explore their perceptions of multiculturalism, intercultural harmony, Muslims and the role of local government. The approach taken attempted to generate

an environment of trust and mutual respect between researcher and participant, so that meaningful data could be generated.

Interviews concentrated on the following areas:

- a) How have current perceptions of multiculturalism changed in response to the current security-dominated political atmosphere?
- b) What are the prevailing perceptions of Australian Muslims in the Darebin community and how does this impact on the future implementation of multicultural services?
- c) What is the most appropriate role for the local City Council in addressing intercultural harmony and understanding?
- d) How could the Darebin City Council develop existing policies and programs in order to foster a higher level of intercultural interaction and understanding in the Darebin community?

### **3.6 Analysis**

Survey data was analysed using SBSS software and through comparative, quantitative analysis.

Interview data was recorded on audio tape, transcribed and subjected to qualitative content analysis.

In light of the survey and interview responses, the existing approach, policies and projects of Darebin city council were assessed in terms of how effective they are in diversifying formerly centralised services and in terms of their capacity to address the increasing levels of social tension against Muslim minorities.

Analysis was undertaken in order to respond to the following inter-related themes:

- Which cultural and political factors can be identified as key indicators of social exclusion, racism against and the loss of cultural identity by Muslim minorities in multicultural societies?
- What actions can be undertaken by local city councils to pre-empt, or at least minimise such developments in multicultural societies?
- How should future policies, initiatives and programs be formulated to best address the attitudinal and/ or conceptual barriers to the reduction of social tensions involving Muslim communities in Victoria?

Finally, recommendations were made concerning the promotion of intercultural harmony within Darebin City Council.



## **Chapter 4: Darebin City Council Policy Initiatives- Putting Theory into Practice**

The Darebin City Council has taken steps to distinguish itself in the area of intercultural interaction, harmony and understanding and is recognised throughout the community for its progressive approach to multicultural affairs. Through the efforts of Darebin's Multicultural Affairs Unit (MAU) in conjunction with the Darebin Ethnic Communities Council (DECC) the Darebin City Council has embarked on a long-term process of diversifying centralised services in order to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services to Darebin residents. The aim is to help foster greater understanding between different groups and thereby to reduce intercultural tension in the community. This chapter provides an overview of how this approach developed and gives an example of best practice through Darebin's efforts to 'put theory into practice' at the local level.

### **4.1 The City of Darebin Community Profile**

The City of Darebin is a large municipality, consisting of eight precincts: Alphington, Bundoora North-East, Fairfield, Northcote, Preston, Reservoir, Thornbury and Westgarth. It was formed in June 1994 through an amalgamation of the Cities of Preston, Northcote and small parts of the Cities of Coburg, Heidelberg and Diamond Valley.

The Darebin City Council serves a very diverse community, with the six largest ethnic groups from Italy, Greece, the United Kingdom, China, Vietnam and Lebanon. In recent years, the demographic has been changing in that there has been a decline in the proportion of Italian, Greek and Macedonian born residents and significant population growth from countries including Sri Lanka, India, Egypt, the Philippines and the Middle East.

According to the 2005 City of Darebin Household Survey, the proportion of respondents born in Australia has consistently been just under three-quarters (73%). The cultural and ethnic heritage of the remaining respondents encompassed 70 different countries. 67.5% of the respondents speak English as their first language, and many are able to speak one or more second languages. Approximately 40% of the population prefers to speak a language other than English at home.

The main faiths represented in the City of Darebin are Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Other forms of diversity found in the City of Darebin include the following: one in twenty-five is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; one in five has a disability; one in five is aged over sixty; and one in seven earns below the poverty index (see 2005 City of Darebin Household Survey; and the Council website at [www.darebin.gov.au](http://www.darebin.gov.au)).

### **4.2 A 'new' vision for the Darebin City Council**

Reflecting a commitment to its demographics, the Darebin City Council has formulated the following vision: Darebin is to be 'a diverse and democratic city where

citizens work together to advance community life'. For the council staff, this involves recognising that Darebin is one of the most diverse councils in Victoria. Any Council policies related to cultural diversity must include reference to three major areas of diversity including disability, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and ethnic communities in the council area (*Diversity Policy*, Darebin City Council, 2003).

With this approach Darebin City Council has taken steps towards implementing a tangible 'community strategy' related to diversity, as introduced by the Local Government Association (2002) and Cattle (2001) and discussed in the preceding chapter.

In accordance with these priorities, the Darebin City Council's *Diversity Policy* (2003) posits that it is no longer appropriate or acceptable for councils to approach their respective constituencies as 'one undifferentiated group', or alternatively to treat particular ethnic groups as the exception to the rule and in need of specialised services that place a burden on council resources.

Among the ways that Darebin City Council has pursued these objectives is through its commitment to public consultations, whereby the people in Darebin are provided a means to vocalise their individual concerns and preferences during the initial stages of policy formulation and ratification.

The objective is to ensure that Council activities both create and retain legitimacy through the incorporation of various 'representational agents' from the community, with these including individuals, NGOs and local organisations. In this way, Council attempts to produce a plan of and for the community, 'rather than ... a plan either *for* the city council or *of* the city council'. To achieve this, Darebin City Council has adopted a 'complex steering role' that requires it to coordinate and harness economic and political aspects of 'building a more egalitarian city'.

#### **4.2.1 Progressive Steps to Diversification**

This approach is the result of evolving policies beginning in 1998 that were inspired by two pieces of government legislation. In 1998, federal, state and local governments adopted the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*. According to the Charter, local City Councils were given the responsibility to ensure that government services are not based on discriminatory practices, that they are administered on the basis of 'fair treatment' such that they are available to 'everyone who is entitled to them', and that all groups in the community know about and understand what their entitlements are.

Further to this, in 1999, the Victorian State Government introduced the *Best Value Legislation*, which was to replace the preceding policy of Compulsory Competitive Tendering. The Darebin City Council adopted aspects of this legislation and its principles were used as a foundation for the formulation of Darebin's Best Value policy. With this, each of the 56 service units in Darebin was reviewed according to its operational framework and infrastructure 'with the aim of improving the service and rendering it more responsive to the needs of the community'.

In 1999, the Darebin City Council decided to conduct an audit on its performance with the objective of better serving the needs of its culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse communities. The audit consisted of community consultations,

internal interviews with key directors, managers and council officers, and the formulation of a final audit report.

The objectives of the *Access and Equity Evaluation Audit* were to:

- identify barriers and gaps in policies, strategies and service provision for non-English speaking background and Aboriginal communities in the area serviced by Darebin City Council,
- to report on access and equity issues related to the Darebin City Council's service provision,
- to make recommendations for future directives through the formulation of access and equity performance indicators specific to Darebin City Council,
- to assist in the development of a *Cultural Diversity Service Charter* for Darebin City Council, together with implementation strategies for future initiatives.

The essential message emerging from the Audit was that it was increasingly important for local city councils to be responsive to the diversity found within their community and its constituencies (*Darebin's Access and Equity Evaluation*, Audit Report, 1999).

Even with the broad range of activities that already existed for the Darebin City Council – including infrastructure, urban development and planning, community facilities and recreation, community care, family and health services, environmental services, parks and libraries – more needed to be done. Through the course of the audit, it was made clear that in Darebin, there was a persistent general lack of awareness of the range of services available from the Council. To overcome this, in addition to needing to provide more information to the community about its services, it was recommended that Darebin City Council involve representatives from different communities in the design, evaluation and implementation of its proposed new service design.

It was envisioned that through this process, Darebin City Council's policies and programs would be made more *effective and efficient*. Effectiveness would follow from an improved capacity to provide 'good service to every customer and ensuring that government serves all citizens'. Efficiency would follow from the utilisation of Council and community resources so as to provide 'the right service, the right way the first time to meet the precise needs of each and every client'.

To clarify these objectives, the following table was formulated by Darebin City Council:

<i>COUNCIL PURPOSE</i> <i>The City of Darebin will:</i>	SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVING A DIVERSE COMMUNITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pursue a leadership role in local government through innovation and by working in partnership with the local community.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop cutting edge strategies for serving a diverse community and meeting varied community needs appropriately.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Be open, accountable and responsive to the community through effective consultation and communication.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to the needs of a diverse community, and communicate effectively so that all citizens know that services are available.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Develop and maintain high quality systems of service delivery that meet the community's social, cultural and recreational needs.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build in flexibility and continuous improvement systems so that services are constantly being evaluated and adapted to meet varied and changing needs.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve optimum value and benefits for the community from Council resources through responsible financial and resource management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate access and outcomes for different groups, in order to ensure that benefits are equitably distributed across the community and that resources are not used inappropriately.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulate economic development in the municipality to generate local employment opportunities and to enhance local amenities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build on the strengths of diversity in attracting economic development and employment opportunities to Darebin.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in high quality policy planning, strategic planning and research and development initiatives to ensure Council is well informed for its longer term decision making responsibilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate diversity perspectives (niche marketing, productive diversity strategies, multicultural community development etc.) in all policy planning and strategic development processes.</li> </ul>

(Darebin's Access and Equity Evaluation, Audit Report, 1999)

It should be noted that this particular approach was part of a wider business trend that emphasised the customisation of services according to the unique needs of the client over the prevailing principles associated with mass production of products. In the business world, this was part of the debate over the merits and short-falls of *mass marketing*, where different products are made for different markets or one product is marketed in different ways, to *niche marketing*, where products are tailored to a particular context.

As highlighted in the *Access and Equity Evaluation*, 'the notion of public service in a culturally diverse society is built on precisely these ideas', but implemented in a different context. To incorporate these principles into their conception of service delivery, the Darebin City Council adopted the principles outlined by the Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture (CWCC). The core element of CWCCs approach to cultural diversity is that good customer service, in this case at the local level, should be determined by programs that recognise one simple maxim: 'the more niche markets there are, the more subtly variegated they are'.

The lesson for local City Councils was that in order to gain a competitive edge, a service provider must adapt services to the cultural differences of the community it serves. This requires listening and responding to the needs and concerns of the consumer, that is, residents of the City of Darebin. From the perspective of local government, this prompts consideration of how to customise centralised, government services to suit the different cultural and linguistic needs of the community.

Building on CWCC principles, the Darebin City Council formulated a 'new' conception of cultural diversity, which can be summarised in the following points:

- Whereas diverse ethnic communities were formerly regarded as problematic outsiders, the new concept of diversity 'refers to relationships' between groups, where none are neatly categorised within an insider/outsider dichotomy.
- Whereas multicultural policies had previously been perceived as 'looking after the special interests of some groups at the expense of others', the new diversity message was that policies dedicated to diversity are relevant to everyone, which means that policies on diversity should be viewed as a 'core business competency'.
- Whereas diversity policies were previously directed at encouraging the different ethnic groups into one homogenous culture, the new diversity

message posits that organisations must be ‘open and welcoming of the productive dynamics produced by diversity’.

The core requirements of this type of approach is that local government remain responsive, flexible and adaptive, but most importantly, it must retain the capacity to change its service infrastructure with the changing needs of the community (CWCC: *Productive Diversity*).

As valuable as the principles taken from the business sector are, there were certain limitations to this analogy. The most important distinction when applying these principles to local government is that community residents are considered *citizens*, and citizens are not only *customers* in that they are not only receiving a service dictated by the exchange of supply and demand, but they also have rights based on the principles of entitlement and eligibility.

What this means in practice is that whereas a customer enters into a relationship with a particular service provider *by choice*, the failure of local government to meet a citizen’s entitlements ‘leads to entirely different claims’ and entails different consequences associated with the democratic process of government.

Local government is charged with the responsibility of community development and participation, not with the maximisation of sales. This means that the public information responsibility of local government is different from the concept of marketing in that residents of a particular community *must* be made aware of their entitlements (*Darebin’s Access and Equity Evaluation*, Audit Report, 1999).

#### **4.2.2 Diversity policy framework**

Building on from this position, the Victorian Government released a policy statement in 2002 entitled *Valuing Cultural Diversity* that outlined a whole-of-government approach to cultural diversity. The core objectives of this approach were to value diversity, reduce inequality, encourage participation, and promote the social, cultural and economic benefits of cultural diversity to all Victorians. This challenged local councils in Victoria to establish longer-term plans to deal with the challenges associated with cultural diversity.

Partly in response to this the Darebin City Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2003 with the Darebin Ethnic Communities Council (DECC). The MAU works closely with the DECC, a peak body which seeks to understand and represent the views and interests of Darebin’s culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities through ongoing consultation with minority groups. In this role, DECC liaises between Council and Darebin’s CALD communities. A key objective of the organisation is to promote multicultural values and practices in the community and serve as an advocate to the formulation of multicultural policies by lobbying for the provision of culturally appropriate services in Darebin. The primary aim of these activities is to stimulate multicultural debate around public policies and community programs, but more importantly to find ways to help empower minority groups and organisations to handle their own affairs. The MOU signed in 2003 followed on from an initial MOU signed in August 2000.

According to the 2003 MOU, there are five targeted components to building a diversity management capacity at the City of Darebin:

- information, awareness and communication,
- committed people,
- accountability, performance measuring and reporting
- best value service reviews
- innovation, leadership and special projects

With these objectives, the Darebin City Council created a longer-term, continuing relationship with the Darebin community that is based on a commitment to regular consultation sessions with DECC and the community, testing new ideas when appropriate, implementing projects to ensure up-to-date information on community needs and regular reporting on the progress made (See also: ICMA International Best Practice 2004, Darebin City Council).

Reflecting the commitments fostered through the Memorandum of Understanding, the Darebin City Council formulated its *Diversity Policy* in 2003. This involved five major components of building a diversity management capacity at Darebin:

- leadership through committed people,
- communication that fosters reliable information and awareness,
- resourcing through training and support,
- performance markers and accountability, and
- innovation through special projects.

The primary objective of this policy was to help create an effective diversity management strategy for Darebin that reaches beyond certain services and encompasses the whole of council. Its purpose was thus to ensure that the residents of Darebin are provided 'equitable and appropriately designed access to services, employment and representational services' regardless of their family background. It aimed to develop an 'ongoing program of innovation' that allows the Council to cater for the community's changing needs (*Diversity Policy*, Darebin City Council, 2003). In this respect the policy was designed to foster regular consultations between Councillors and the community in an effort to improve its provision of services on a continual basis (*Diversity Policy*, Darebin City Council, 2003; see also ICMA Best Practices, 2004). An additional component was to ensure that the council staff continues to reflect the cultural diversity of the Darebin community through the recruitment and hiring of new council staff from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds (*Diversity Policy*, Darebin City Council, 2003).

The Darebin City Council reaffirmed its commitment to these ideals last year when they signed a *Community Accord* on 2 May 2005. With this accord, the Council agreed to:

- **respect** all ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic communities;
- **promote** respect for diversity across our communities;
- **seek** opportunities to work together to reaffirm our similarities as human beings and the fundamental principles that unite us as Victorians;
- **advocate** for the elimination of racial and religious intolerance;
- **reject** all forms of racial and religious vilification, violence, harassment and unlawful discrimination.

A notable addition to this Accord was the inclusion of religious communities as a separate, prominent entity. This was done to reflect the Council's commitment to

ensuring that recent international events did not impact negatively on those residents of Darebin who adhere to different religious faiths.

### **4.3 Multicultural Services at Darebin**

Darebin City Council has many different programs related to their commitment to providing diversified services to the community. These initiatives begin with the Council staff. Council provides diversity related information in all position descriptions and acts as an equal opportunity employer. To ensure that this approach is observed throughout the various branches of Council, Council employees are offered a range of training, including equal opportunity training (EEO), diversity training, training in working with interpreters and in preparing documentation for translation. This is in addition to various seminars that deal with different issues related to the Darebin community profile and cultural diversity. Also available to staff are the *Multilingual Communications Guidelines* which instruct Council staff on the most appropriate and effective ways to communicate with residents that speak little or no English, as well as information on when interpreting services should be contacted.

The Council also provides many different multicultural services to the community with its translating and interpreting services among the most highly recognised. The Darebin City Council offers a Multilingual Communication Service (MCS), which allows Darebin city residents the opportunity to communicate with the city council in their preferred language. The MCS is an in-house communication service that consists of a Multilingual Telephone Line (MTL) operated by a pool of Language Aides (LAs) (bilingual staff who provide basic interpreting services to Council staff in their interaction with CALD residents). The council also provides on-line multilingual information and a centralised translation service.

These services can be accessed on-line, over-the-counter or by the telephone. The Darebin City Council also uses professional interpreters who are engaged for lengthy interviews or in situations that involve statutory requirements as in signing legally binding documents or when giving warnings about breaches of Council by-laws.

To gather additional feedback directly from Darebin residents, the Darebin City Council hosts 'Listening Posts' throughout the community, where residents are able to express their opinion about various issues in the community. Professional translators are engaged so as to ensure that all who want to participate can do so. These translators are only a small extension of the many interpreting and translating services provided by Council to broaden participation in all Council programs.

Internet resources are also utilised in that the Council offers a multilingual website that is available in the top twelve languages of the community, as well as a Multicultural Resource Directory, which contains listings of over 600 groups, associations and organisations that either offer public services to specific ethnic communities, or that advertise the small (independently run) businesses in the community. Darebin City Council has also created a corporate letterhead that includes translated messages on the back that direct residents to the MTL for further instructions on how to access council services.

Darebin community libraries have books and resources available to people from many different ethnic backgrounds including an advertised Arabic section. Ethnic specific children's programs are held in the Darebin community libraries to encourage higher

participation levels by people from non-English speaking backgrounds and greater exposure to the different communities in the Darebin community. Through this program, local children are introduced at an early age to the benefits of cultural diversity. The Darebin library system also hosts other culturally specific events, such as the public launch of Arabic DVDs or CDs into the library collection.

Other services are offered to the community, including public events that promote cultural harmony, street festivals, information sessions on community religious and ethnic groups and specialised projects. Specific events include Refugee Week, Cultural Diversity Week, Harmony Day, Neighbourhood Festival Day and the Festival of Kites. Ethnic groups, clubs and associations are also given the opportunity to apply for funding through the Community Grants Scheme in order to hold their own events. 'Meals on Wheels' serves ethnically or religiously specific meals (including Halal choices) and Council swimming pools offer women's only swimming programs to encourage greater usage by Muslim women.

Darebin's Multicultural Affairs Unit (MAU) engages in and organises these activities, as well as promoting multicultural programs and initiatives that will be of benefit to the community. The MAU effectively advises and assists Council services to achieve access and equity outcomes that are relevant to Darebin's diverse community. Internally, the MAU responds to Darebin's CALD communities and acts as a mediator. Externally, the MAU first serves as a communicating and advocating link between Council and the community, and second, promotes the benefits of diversity to the wider community.

#### **4.4 Multicultural Initiatives and Special Programs**

Two recent capstone initiatives by the Darebin City Council are outlined in this section to provide insight into Council's commitment to multicultural services and policies.

##### **➤ 2003 Managing Diversity Conference**

The City of Darebin Managing Diversity Conference was held in October 2003. It was hosted by the City of Darebin in association with the Victorian Multicultural Commission and DECC. The conference was a key opportunity for community groups, policy officers and representatives to discuss multiculturalism and diversity.

It was targeted at people working in positions where they were leading and managing change in the diversity area. Keynote speakers included Laksiri Jayasuriya (eminent Western Australian Emeritus Professor), Debra Dodgson (National Manager of Workforce Diversity for Australia Post), Neil Edwards (Executive Chairman of the Port of Melbourne corporation), Pat Quirke Parry (head of Sales at SBS), Dr. Sev Ozdowski (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioner), Alastair Nicholson (Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia), and Harriyet Babacan (Executive Director of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Queensland).

Other speakers were from Melbourne University, Monash University, the Mt Eliza Business School and RMIT University, as well as a small number from the UK, USA and New Zealand.



### ➤ 2004 Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project

The Cramer Street Project was funded under the Federal Government's *Living in Harmony* initiative, was administered by DIMIA, and involved a partnership between the Darebin City Council and representatives from the Cramer Street neighbourhood. This project responded to community tensions between people of different religious orientations in the northern suburbs of Melbourne.

The project included a number of consultative projects and two detailed surveys. Cramer Street was the focus of the project, in part, because it is home to the first Islamic Mosque in Victoria, Omar Bin Khuttab Mosque, established in 1975. Over 10,000 Muslims attend the Cramer Street Mosque.

The primary objective of the Cramer Street Project was to 'tackle racial tension amongst people from diverse backgrounds living in the project area'. Project aims included:

- the development of a neighbourhood focused program which creates opportunities for neighbours to socialise, mix and enjoy cultural, social and educational activities,
- the minimisation of isolation and segregation between neighbours which arise out of differences in ethnicities, culture, religions and languages,
- the reduction of conflict in the neighbourhood due to intolerance of difference,
- the increased understanding and appreciation of difference, and
- the promotion of the concept of inclusive neighbourhood.

Through this project, community residents were provided with opportunities to come together, learn from each other and reduce previously held prejudices and misconceptions about the different religious groups in the area (*Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project: Reference Guide*, Darebin City Council, 2004).

The vision that was formulated through the consultation sessions with area residents was that Council policies should be more inclusive of ways to improve interfaith relations in the City of Darebin. As a result of the Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project, the Darebin City Council created a 'community consultation program' that included the entire Darebin community and sought to understand the community views about issues of faith.

The program culminated in the production of the *Interfaith Consultation Report* in April 2005, which revealed that Darebin residents were interested in gaining more information about other religious practices, especially in conjunction with interfaith initiatives. According to this report, the people of Darebin 'indicated that social interaction and gatherings were the most effective ways of learning about other cultures and religions' (Lum *et al*, 2005:6-9).

## 4.5 Conclusion

The Darebin City Council has taken steps to distinguish its efforts in the area of intercultural interaction, harmony and understanding. Through the efforts of Darebin's MAU and in conjunction with DECC, Darebin Council has established an ongoing consultation program with the Darebin community in all its diversity. It has well-

developed policies and programs in place in order to sustain an ongoing process of diversifying previously centralised services.

In all policies, there is a commitment by the Darebin City Council to providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services to all communities in Darebin. Additionally, the Council accepts the responsibility of providing the community with frequently distributed, accurate information about the various ethnic and religious groups in the area. The aim is to help foster greater understanding between different groups and thereby reduce tension in the community.

Various programs are available both to staff and to the community. Darebin City Council is an equal opportunity employer and makes every effort to recruit a diverse workforce that is representative of the diversity in the community. All staff are moreover offered diversity training programs.

There are also many events and programs open to the community. In addition to the multilingual resources available at the library, the Darebin City Council provides extensive translating and interpreting services. Festivals and information sessions are also held for the community's benefit and enjoyment.

## **Chapter 5: Community and Darebin Employee Data Analysis**

In September 2005, the Multicultural Affairs Unit (Community Planning and Advocacy Branch) of the Darebin City Council, in conjunction with Deakin University, undertook an organisation-wide survey of Darebin Council employees to ascertain attitudes towards diversity in the community. The Darebin Staff Diversity Survey was administered by the Performance Support Branch of the Darebin City Council. There were a total of 262 respondents, which represents approximately 33 percent of the total staff numbers in Darebin City Council.

The largest group of respondents were born in Australia/New Zealand/Oceania (75%), had some educational qualification beyond high school (85%) and had worked for the City of Darebin longer than one year but less than five years. A higher percentage of respondents were female (68%). Nearly half of the respondents considered themselves Christian (49%) and spoke English (54%).

In addition to the staff survey, Deakin University and the MAU commissioned Metropolis Research Pty Ltd to undertake a survey of Darebin residents about their views on multiculturalism, diversity and attitudes towards the Muslim community in particular.

A total of 300 interview-style surveys of 10-15 minutes duration were conducted by trained Metropolis Research Pty Ltd staff over a period of 4 weeks. Approximately 38 surveys were conducted in each of Darebin's eight precincts (Alphington, Bundoora North East, Fairfield, Northcote, Preston, Reservoir, Thornbury and Westgarth) to ensure an accurate representation of the community.

The demographics were more varied in the community survey. The largest groups of respondents were professionals (38.4%), associate professionals (12.6%), and managers and administrators (10.3%). Intermediate clerical, sales and service personnel were also represented at 17.9%. A higher percentage of respondents were female (54.5%). Most were from either a two parent family (45%) or from a couple only household (25.6%). Most had lived in Darebin for 10 years or more (38.3%).

A detailed discussion of the survey methodology and its limitations is provided in chapter 3. This chapter provides an analysis of the survey data.

### **5.1 Content of surveys and structure of analytical discussion**

The Darebin Staff Diversity Survey can be divided into four general sections:

- 1) Cultural diversity,
- 2) Multiculturalism and Multicultural Policies,
- 3) The Role of Local Government in the area of Intercultural Harmony,
- 4) The Attitudes of Council Employees to Muslim groups in Australia generally, the Darebin community specifically.

Each of these four areas of investigation were formulated to better understand the challenges related to the diversification of centralised services by local city councils and how this relates to intercultural harmony and understanding.

Council employees were surveyed in order to gain insight into how they perceive their role within the Darebin community. It was also meant to probe for opinions of how current practices and programs could be changed and improved. Council employees are well situated to provide information on how current policies and practices have been received by the public and associated problems of implementation.

The external community survey was divided into six general sections:

- 1) Interaction with other Ethnic Groups,
- 2) Multiculturalism and Multicultural Policies,
- 3) Government Funding of Services,
- 4) Attitudes Towards Muslim Communities,
- 5) Community Diversity in Darebin,
- 6) Council Services,

The aim of the external community survey was to explore community perceptions about how well Darebin policies targeted at promoting harmony and understanding between ethnic groups within the community have worked, or not, especially at a time of increased racial tensions due to the rise of terrorism, immigration issues and the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. It also again tested Darebin residents' understanding of multiculturalism and multicultural policies, as well as their attitudes towards Muslim communities in the City of Darebin.

Whenever possible, the same questions on multiculturalism and the perception of Muslim communities in Australia were included in both the internal staff survey and the external community survey. They nevertheless differed with reference to the questions about the Darebin City Council. This was appropriate since Council employees will have particular perspectives and experiences of the MAU while people in the community may have had little or no direct experience with Council programmes and policies. In this way, it also tested for community awareness of the different services provided by Darebin City Council.

This chapter presents and compares the results of the two surveys. In so far as possible, the analysis in this chapter is structured according to four common themes: multiculturalism, diversity in Darebin, attitudes towards Muslims and the role of local government. Where questions differed considerably analysis is presented in terms of the individual survey results. Because of the scope of the Community Survey and the increased number of respondents, sub-analysis is provided for the various suburbs included in the City of Darebin.

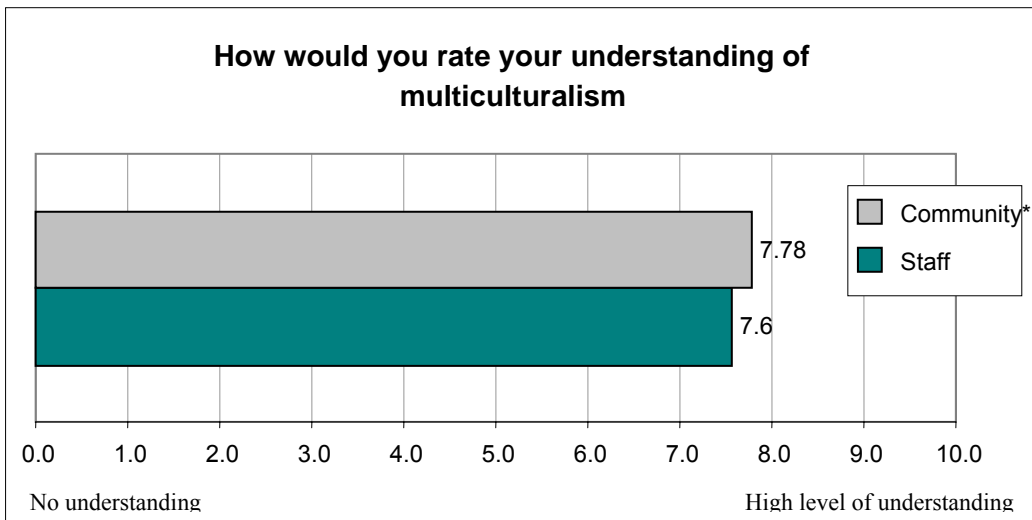
The thematic structure of the chapter differs from that of each survey. This structure has been changed in order to allow for an easier comparison of results both between the two surveys and between the surveys and the qualitative interviews examined in the following chapter. It also allows for a clear progression of ideas. Whereas the more sensitive topics were explored last in this survey, the results will be examined earlier in this chapter to illustrate their importance to Council activities.

## 5.2 Views on Multiculturalism

### 5.2.1 Understanding of multiculturalism

The internal and external surveys each examined community perceptions of multiculturalism by asking respondents to score their level of understanding of multiculturalism on a scale 0-10 with one indicating little or no knowledge of what this term means and ten indicating a high level of understanding. It is important to note that this question does not measure the respondent's actual understanding of multiculturalism against an objective definition. The question was designed to illicit the respondent's perception of their general understanding of the concept of multiculturalism.

Both the staff and the community perceived that they had a relatively high understanding of Multiculturalism with an average score close to 8 for both. The combined responses are presented in the following graph.



Staff respondents were generally confident about their understanding of multiculturalism, scoring a 7.6 mean. Similarly, community respondents believe that they have a relatively good understanding of multiculturalism with respondents from all areas rating their understanding above 7 out of 10. Respondents in Northcote claimed to have the highest level of understanding with an average score of 7.88.

It is of note that respondents from the staff survey had a lower average understanding of multiculturalism than the community of Darebin, the latter with a mean of 7.8. There may be many reasons for this variation, including by way of example, greater understanding of the complexity of the concept of multiculturalism by Council officers.

The results strongly suggest that Darebin's community believes it has a solid understanding of the concept of multiculturalism. Only 35 out of 300 community respondents (approximately 10%) rated their understanding at 5 or less, and only 3 respondents rated it at 0. More than 60% of community respondents rated their understanding at 8 or higher.

### 5.2.2 What multiculturalism means to me

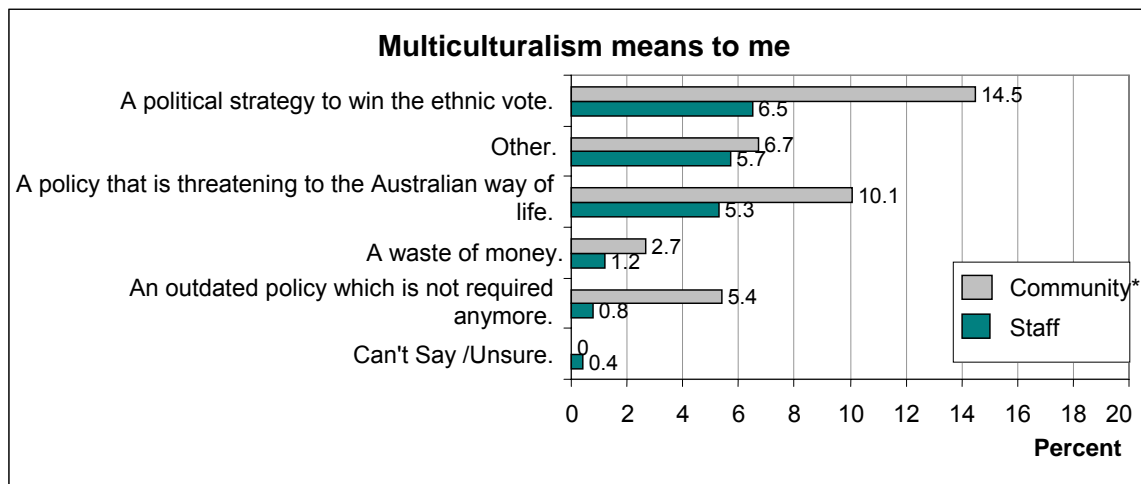
To further test what each respondent had in mind when responding to the first question, staff and community respondents were asked to further differentiate their level of understanding of multiculturalism by selecting options related to the statement: ‘multiculturalism means to me...’. All statements, both positive and negative, were taken from opinion pieces in *The Age* and *The Herald Sun* in July 2005.

The responses have been separated into two groups presented in the following graphs. The first graph presents the most selected responses and includes mostly positive associated meanings for multiculturalism.



Roughly 80-90% of staff indicated that for them, multiculturalism meant ‘a fair go regardless of the country of birth’ and/or ‘freedom for communities to celebrate their customs and traditions’. The results from the community survey were generally comparable to the staff results except for the higher scores given by the community (68%) to the perception that multiculturalism can also mean: ‘assistance to migrants to help them achieve equality with Australian born citizens’. Roughly 70% of staff and community respondents view multiculturalism as a means to celebrate the heritage of all of the different groups living in the City of Darebin.

The perception that multiculturalism is under threat in Australia is challenged by responses to more negative perceptions. The following table details the answers of the respondents to the following options (see following Table, next page).



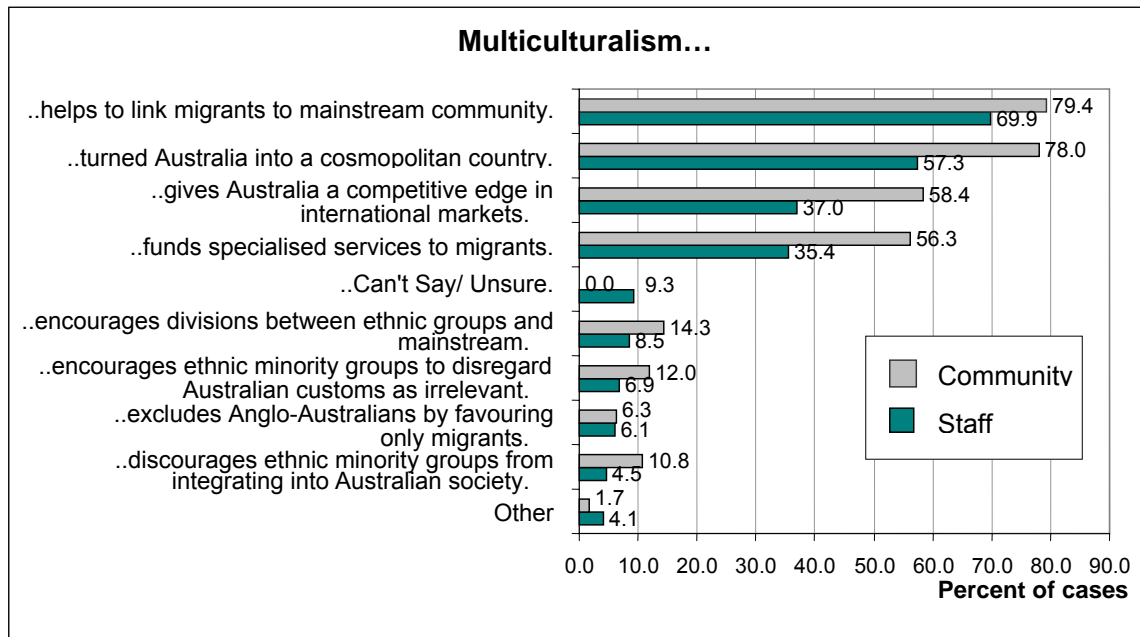
The combined results for these options were more variable. In response to these (more negative) connotations of multiculturalism, the Community respondents scored higher than the Staff respondents for all of the statements offered, sometimes significantly.

Approximately 10% of community respondents viewed multiculturalism as a potential threat to the Australian way of life, compared to 5.3% of staff. Consider, for example, the following general comment by one community respondent: ‘Council should also promote Australian values’ and should not pander only to the ethnic groups. A further 5% of community respondents stated that multiculturalism is an outdated policy that is no longer required, compared with less than 1% of staff. These results suggest that there is a small but sizeable group in the community who hold ‘negative’ views on the role of multiculturalism in contemporary Australian society. While these perceptions are contested and not widely vocalised, it is nevertheless something to be addressed by councils.

Nearly 15% of community respondents in Darebin perceive multiculturalism is a political strategy to win the ethnic vote, somewhat higher at 18.2% in the Northcote SLA. 6.5% of staff responded in the same way. The perception of multiculturalism as a political tool was also demonstrated through a number of comments elicited via the community survey. One respondent in particular demanded that the ideological components of multiculturalism should not be mistaken for a symbol of tolerance in the community.

### 5.2.3 Impact of multiculturalism

The next question was included to test how respondents felt about the economic and political impact of multiculturalism in Australia. The responses are presented in the following table according to the frequency with which each option was chosen.



Community respondents again chose *all* of the attributed meanings of multiculturalism presented here more than the staff respondents. Three-quarters of community respondents perceived multicultural policies as a way to link migrants to the mainstream community (75.7%). Similar support was shown (74.3%) for the belief that multiculturalism, as a policy, had helped to turn Australia into a cosmopolitan country from the 1970s onwards. These ideals are linked with the original objectives of multiculturalism, as it was enacted in Australia.

By contrast, more than 10% of respondents agreed with what could reasonably be termed ‘negative’ statements regarding multiculturalism. For example, more than 13% stated that it encourages divisions between ethnic groups (15% in the Northcote SLA) and almost 12% of respondents in Darebin felt that multicultural policies had effectively encouraged ethnic minority groups to disregard Australian customs.

Taking the results of this and the previous section together, it would appear that Darebin Council employees are supportive of multiculturalism and see this policy in positive terms in relation to its impact on the Darebin community. While a clear majority of Darebin residents hold favourable views on multiculturalism (70% - 75%), a significant proportion of respondents (5% to 15%) hold negative or at least cynical views on multiculturalism.

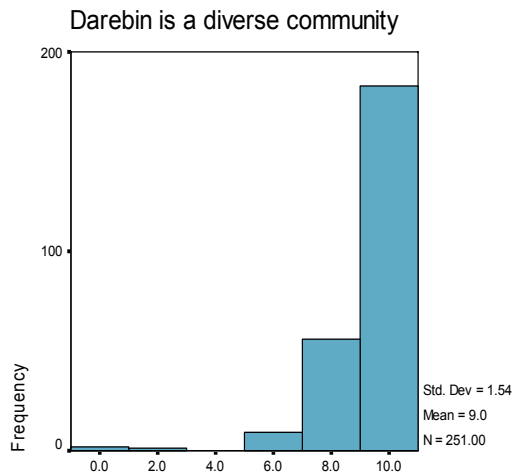
## 5.3 Views on Diversity in the City of Darebin

### 5.3.1 The value of diversity

Both surveys additionally examined the perceptions held of the increasing levels of diversity in the Darebin community and asked respondents whether this development was viewed in positive or negative terms.

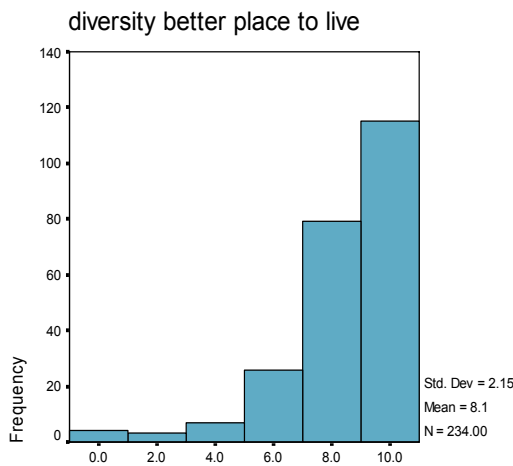


## Perceptions of Diversity in Darebin: Staff Responses

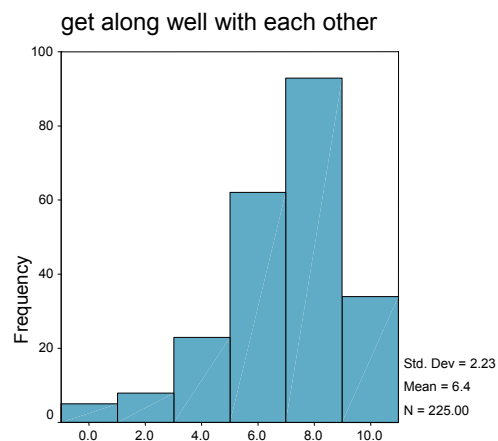


This section asked respondents to answer on a scale of 0 to 10, how they would describe their level of agreement with each of the following statements:

- Darebin is a diverse community that incorporates people from many different cultural backgrounds.
- The level of diversity found in the Darebin community makes it a better place to live.
- The different ethnic groups in Darebin get along well with each other and mix easily in the community.



The individual results for the staff survey are presented in the histograms at left



Staff respondents felt strongly that Darebin is a diverse community that incorporates people from many different backgrounds (with a mean of 9.0) and that the diversity found in Darebin makes it a better place to live (mean 8.1).

There was a mixed reaction as to whether the different ethnic groups get along and mix well (mean 6.4) in the Darebin community. While the majority of respondents answered in positive terms to the three questions, the issue of intercultural harmony in Darebin evoked more negative answers with scores under five and fewer positive answers with scores of nine or ten.

The results for the community survey are presented in the following table.

<b>Perceptions of Diversity in Darebin: Community Responses</b>				
<i>Statement</i>	<i>Northcote Score</i>	<i>Preston Score</i>	<i>NESB Score</i>	<i>ESB Score</i>
Darebin is a diverse community that incorporates people from many different cultural backgrounds	9.31	8.75	8.81	9.04
	<b>9.49</b>	<b>8.98</b>	<b>9.08</b>	<b>9.25</b>
	9.68	9.22	9.35	9.46
The level of diversity in Darebin makes it a better place to live	8.39	7.61	8.07	7.68
	<b>8.75</b>	<b>7.99</b>	<b>8.46</b>	<b>8.07</b>
	9.11	8.36	8.85	8.47
The different ethnic groups in Darebin get along well with each other and mix easily in the community	7.60	6.94	7.25	7.10
	<b>8.00</b>	<b>7.31</b>	<b>7.66</b>	<b>7.48</b>
	8.40	7.67	8.07	7.87

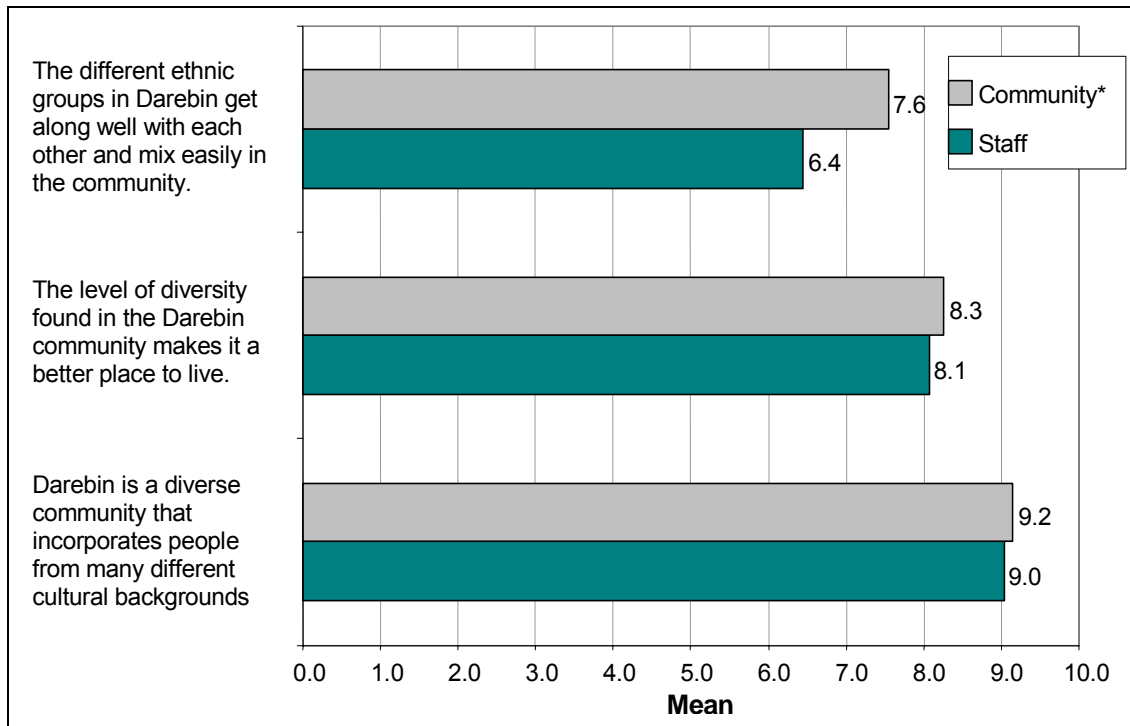
A clear majority of the community respondents strongly agreed that Darebin is a diverse community that incorporates people from many different cultural backgrounds and that the level of diversity in Darebin makes it a better place to live (9.16 and 8.28 respectively).

Northcote Statistical Local Area (SLA) and NESB respondents had a slightly higher level of agreement that the diversity in Darebin makes it a better place to live than others. This was reiterated in general comments, with one respondent asserting that diversity makes life and the community ‘more interesting’ and another that Australia is the best in terms of cultural diversity.

Respondents were slightly less convinced that the different ethnic groups in Darebin get along well with each other, with a municipal average of 7.55. Again, Northcote SLA and NESB respondents had a higher level of agreement with this statement than Preston SLA and ESB respondents. This said, a score of 7.55 is still very strong and suggests that there is a strong level of cultural harmony in Darebin.

The results from the staff and community survey are compared in the following graph.

### Perceptions of Diversity in Darebin



The only statement that had a statistically significant difference of more than a one point average higher score for the community results was in relation to how well different ethnic groups mix in the Darebin community. In response to this statement, the staff mean was 6.4 and the community mean was 7.8.

Interestingly, Darebin employees had a significantly lower level of agreement with this statement than all other groups, including NESB respondents. This could be due to the fact that because Council employees are in daily contact with the different groups in Darebin, they are more likely to be confronted with the problems on a more regular basis.

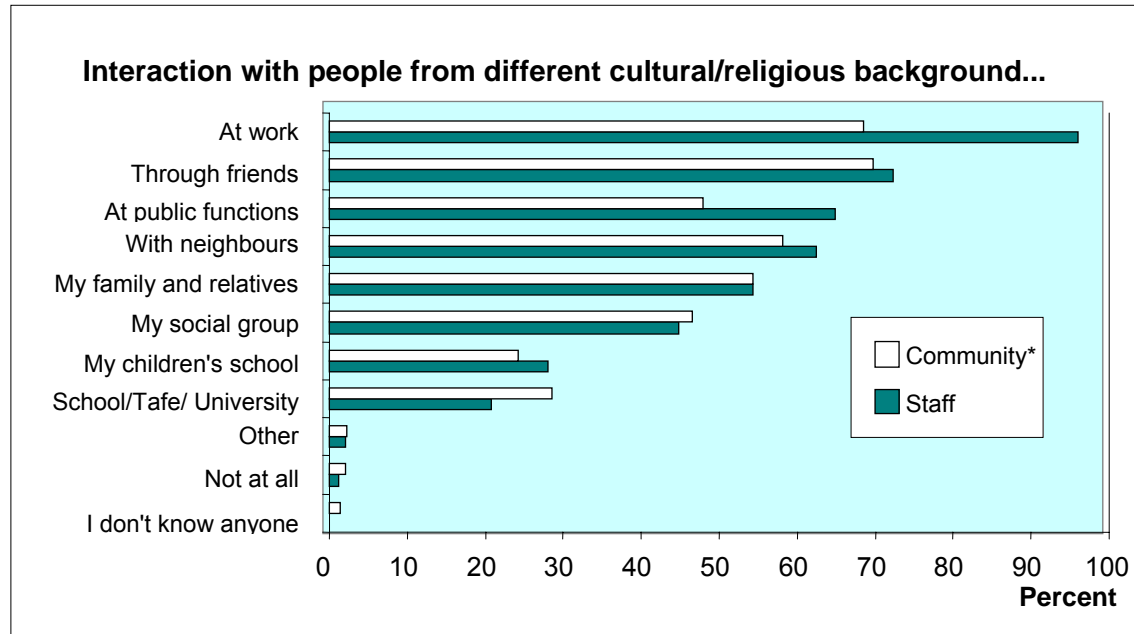
### 5.3.2 Interaction with people from different backgrounds

With such high levels of diversity, another issue to consider is whether or not the different groups interact with one another on a regular basis or if ethnic pockets have formed in the City of Darebin. To test this, respondents were asked how often and where they interact with people from other backgrounds. This question made no distinction between the different minority groups and was therefore inclusive of people from different cultural backgrounds *and* people with different religious affiliations and beliefs. The objective of this question was to test whether or not higher levels of interaction between the different cultural groups would increase people's acceptance of diversity in the community.

Respondents were given a list of places where they might interact with people from a different cultural and/or religious background. The possible answers ranged from 'at

work' and 'public functions' to more private circumstances such as 'through friends', 'with neighbours' or 'through my family and relatives'. Each respondent was able to choose as many answers as were applicable to their situation.

The following graph compares the results of the staff and community surveys.



A clear majority of the staff respondents (96%) indicate that they interact with different groups of people 'at work'. Over 60 to 70% meet these individuals in the following places: the neighbourhood, at public functions and/or through friends. Around half of the staff respondents interact through family, relatives and through their social group.

Almost all of the staff respondents believe they interact with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds in some form or another. Only 1.2% indicated that they did not interact with these groups in any capacity.

The majority of community respondents reported having contact with people from different cultural backgrounds across a wide range of areas. The most frequent locations for contact were at work and/or through friends (68.5% and 69.8% respectively). The only choices where the community either tied or outscored the staff were in relation to their interaction with people from a different background through their family and friends, their social group or at school/university or TAFE.

By contrast, the staff overwhelmingly outscored the community respondents when asked about their interaction at work. This statistical data arguably reflects the benefits of the Darebin City Council's commitment to hiring a diverse workforce.

The following table breaks down the results of the community survey by region.

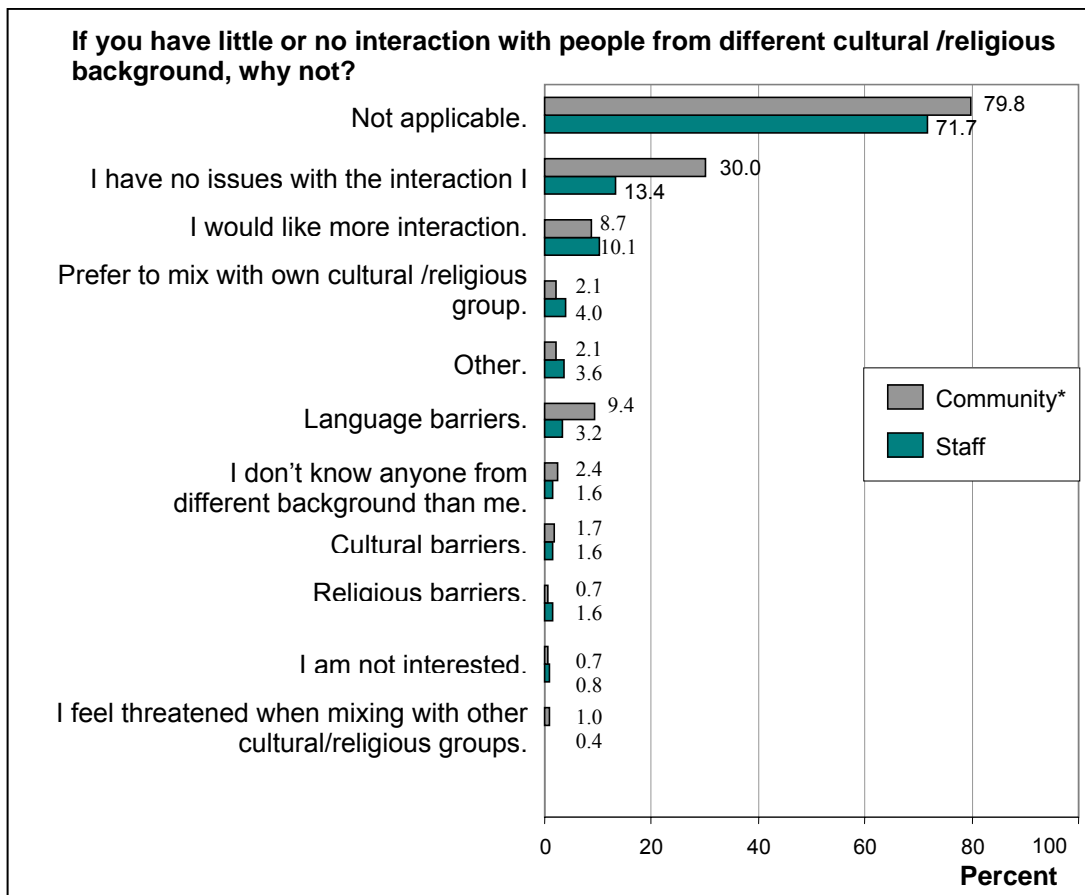
<b>Interaction with People from other Ethnic and Religious Backgrounds</b>				
<i>(Number and percent of total persons)</i>				
	<i>Darebin</i>		<i>Sub- Areas</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Northcote SLA</i>	<i>Preston SLA</i>
At work	204	68.5%	72.9%	65.6%
Through my family and relatives	162	54.4%	58.9%	51.6%
With neighbours	173	58.1%	66.4%	52.6%
Through my children's school	72	24.2%	18.7%	26.6%
Through friends	208	69.8%	82.2%	62.5%
Through school/TAFE/university	85	28.5%	31.8%	26.6%
At public functions	143	48.0%	58.9%	41.7%
Through my social group	139	46.6%	60.7%	38.5%
Not at all	6	2.0%	0.0%	2.6%
I don't know anyone	4	1.3%	0.0%	2.1%
Other	7	2.3%	1.9%	2.6%
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>1,201</b>		<b>484</b>	<b>717</b>
<i>Total valid cases</i>	<i>299</i>		<i>107</i>	<i>192</i>

Respondents in the Northcote SLA had more contact with people from different backgrounds than respondents in the Preston SLA, particularly through friends and social groups. Respondents in the Preston SLA were also more likely to say they did not know anyone from a different cultural background, or alternatively that they had no interaction.

This result is consistent with the greater level of diversity within the Northcote SLA. Northcote, despite having a lower proportion of residents who were not born in Australia, has a greater degree of variation in the mix of cultural groups. This includes not just ethnic cultural groups but also diversity in relation to occupation, qualifications, sexual orientation and other cultural identity. These results do suggest respondents in the Northcote SLA may be more comfortable mixing with people from different cultural backgrounds.

There were nevertheless individuals in both surveys who indicated that they had had little or no interaction with people from different ethnic and/or religious backgrounds. To explore why this was the case, this group was further asked to give their reasons for this choice. A list of ten statements was offered to these respondents, with possible answers ranging from religious, cultural and language barriers to feelings of being threatened through this interaction.

The responses to this question are compared in the table below.



Of those that indicated that they had little or no contact with diverse groups, the majority was not overly concerned with their existing levels of contact. More of the staff (with a mean of 4.0) than the community (with a mean of 2.1) argued that they preferred to interact with people from within their own community. Religious barriers also concerned the staff (with a mean of 1.6) more than the community (with a mean of 0.7). By contrast, more of the community (with a mean of 9.4) than the staff (with a mean of 3.2) cited language barriers as the most significant problem for them. The majority of community respondents answered that the question was not applicable to them or that they had no issues with the interaction they currently have. 1.7% cited cultural barriers as significant. Only 0.7% cited religious barriers.

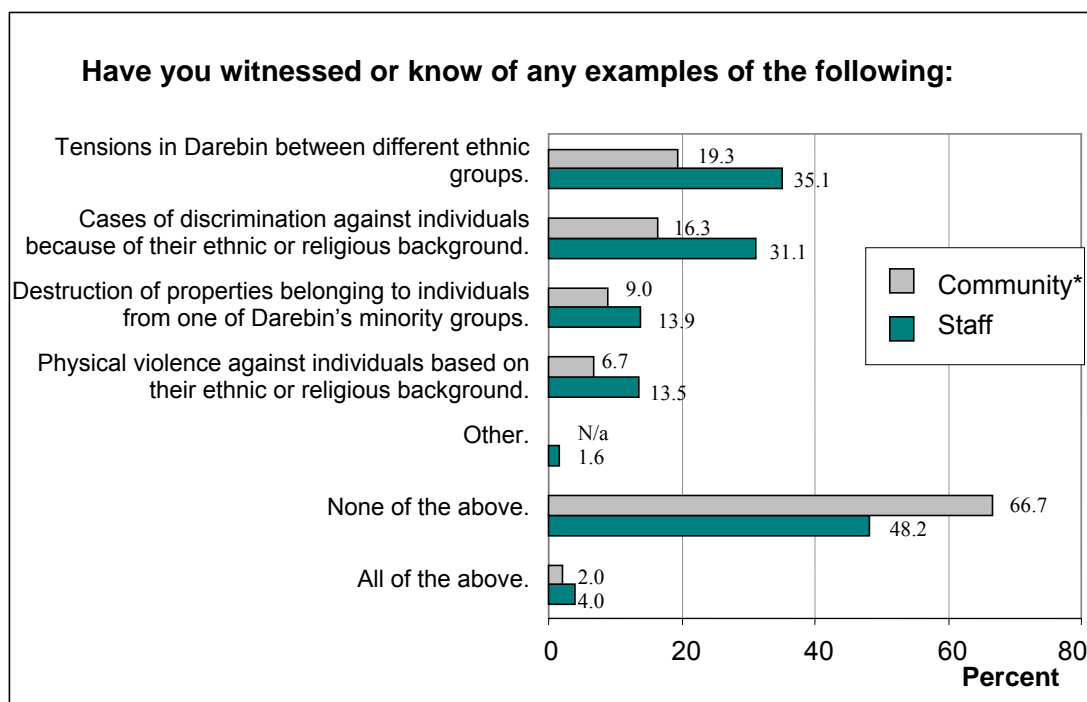
It is interesting to note, however, that while there were concerns about how to interact with people from another group, only 1.0% of the community, as compared with 0.4% of the staff, characterised the prospect of such contact as threatening and avoided contact out of fear. These results indicate the vast majority of respondents who do not interact with people from different backgrounds do so due to language barriers rather than a lack of interest or negative feeling.

Approximately 6% to 13% (mean of 10.1) of the community stated that they would like more interaction than they currently have. This represents a small but significant proportion of the community and represents an opportunity for Council to engage in activities to promote cultural interaction in the community.

There is a possibility that the community survey data collected under-represents the levels of unease experienced in Darebin, if not hostility that certain respondents may have for people from another ethnic or religious background. Because the external survey was conducted door-to-door, but more importantly face-to-face, some people might have misrepresented their actual opinions for fear of being judged negatively by the interviewer.

### 5.3.3 Intercultural harmony

To further test the actual levels of intercultural harmony, the surveys explored respondents' awareness of racial tensions and antisocial behaviour in the Darebin community. Respondents were given a set of possible types of discrimination and/or violence to choose from, if it pertained to their experiences. They were then given the opportunity to add anything to the list which they felt was related to this question. A comparison of staff and community responses is presented in the following table.



More than one third of the staff respondents (31%) had seen tensions between different ethnic groups, as well as incidents of ethnic and/or religious discrimination (35.1%). These are significant numbers and require further examination. In comparing the staff data to the data from the community survey there were a significantly higher proportion of staff respondents who had witnessed or known examples of all of the described behaviours. This discrepancy between staff and community respondents corresponds with the discrepancy in results outlined in section 5.3.1 where staff were less inclined to agree with the statement that the different ethnic groups in Darebin get along well with each other and mix easily in the community.

In accordance with the distinctively positive assessment of cultural diversity in Darebin, it is not surprising that 66.7% of the community respondents replied that they had not witnessed any of the described behaviours. Almost half of the staff respondents (48.2%) were not prepared to say that they had witnessed ethnic or religious discrimination, which is also a positive sign for the levels of intercultural harmony in the City of Darebin. 13.5% of staff had witnessed physical violence

and/or destruction of property, which would imply that this type of activity was not the norm in the community.

It is nevertheless of concern that at least 6.7% of all community respondents reported knowledge of or personal experience with acts of physical violence against individuals because of their ethnic background. Even if there is no verification available for the veracity of these claims, they highlight the presence of an underlying tension between groups.

Most of these respondents alluded to the existence of latent tensions between the different ethnic groups (19.3%). When asked to provide specific examples, eight respondents mentioned that they had witnessed tension and violence between Greeks, Macedonians, Serbs and Croats at sports events. Eight other respondents provided examples of confrontations in public places ranging from Northland Shopping Centre to various modes of public transport.

Graffiti and verbal abuse and violence and destruction of property were the second most commonly cited examples, with 14 each. Violence and destruction of property consisted mostly of references to ethnic gangs and the destruction of churches. Several respondents mentioned racist graffiti and some also spoke of verbal abuse or discrimination against non-Muslims.

Thirteen other respondents concentrated on tension between different youth groups including Indigenous youth, a variety of ethnic youth groups, as well as mainstream youth groups. One respondent attributes this behaviour to ‘teenage angst’ rather than overt discrimination and ethnic hatred. Having said this, there appear to be more separate incidents of this, as opposed to the burning of churches, for example, where several respondents may have been referring to the same incident.

It is important to note that there were different frequencies of reported incidents in areas with higher concentrations of different minority groups. Respondents from the Preston SLA, for example, reported having witnessed a greater number of incidents of racism or racial discrimination than those in the Northcote SLA. The least frequently witnessed incidents of racial discrimination were acts of physical violence, which were approximately the same in Northcote SLA and the Preston SLA.

This table breaks down the data from the community survey according to region.

<b>Incidents of Racism, Discrimination and/or Violence</b>				
<i>(Number and percent of total persons)</i>				
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Darebin</i>		<i>Northcote</i>	<i>Preston</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Tension in Darebin between ethnic groups	58	19.3%	15.9%	21.1%
Cases of discrimination against individuals because of their ethnic or religious background	49	16.3%	12.8%	18.1%
Physical violence against individuals because of their ethnic background	20	6.7%	6.4%	6.7%
Destruction of property belonging to individuals from one of Darebin's minority groups	27	9.0%	5.7%	10.8%
All of the above	6	2.0%	0.0%	3.1%
None of the above	200	66.7%	75.2%	61.7%



## 5.4 Attitudes towards Muslims

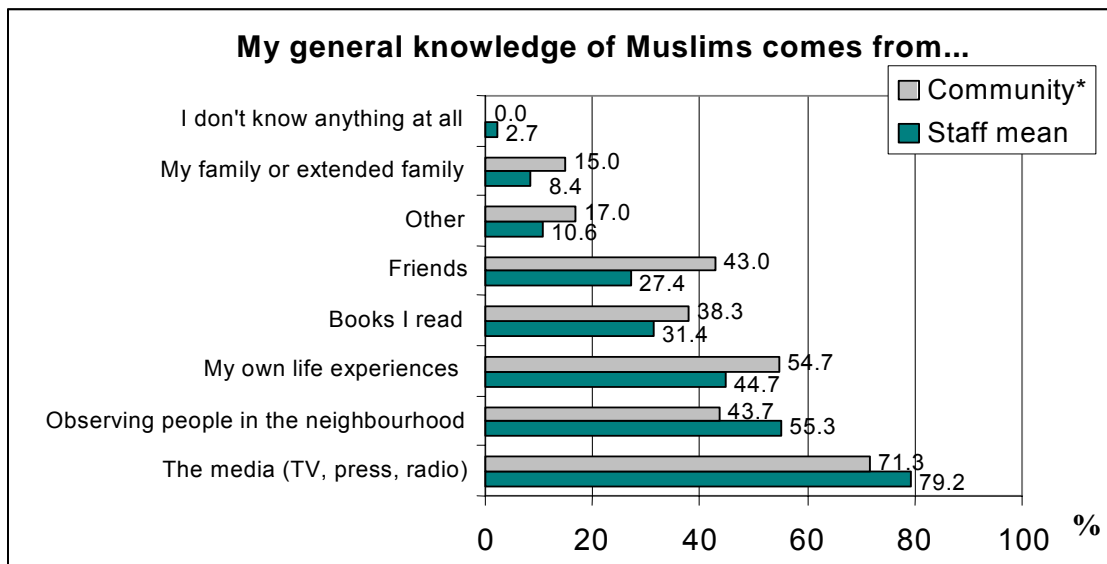
### 5.4.1 Knowledge about Muslims

In order to focus the discussion of diversity Muslim Australians the surveys explored perceptions, knowledge and understanding of people from an Islamic background. This was admittedly the last section of the survey because of its sensitive nature. The survey data will be considered here, before that on the role of local government, to further test the levels of intercultural harmony and understanding in the City of Darebin.

Many of the incidents cited in 5.3.3 involved racism or discrimination specifically against Muslims. These included examples of verbal abuse or discrimination, particularly against women wearing the *hijab*. Several respondents referred to an increase in discrimination against Muslims following the September 11 terrorist attacks. To prompt discussion and test these attitudes further, respondents were reminded prior to being asked specific questions, that Islam is the second largest religious grouping other than Christianity in Darebin. Respondents were then asked to demonstrate where their general knowledge of Muslims comes from and if they interact with people from a Muslim background. The purpose of this question was to test how accurate their information was likely to be and thereby help assess the types of responses given.

In considering the question ‘Where does your general knowledge of Muslims come from?’ Respondents were presented with a range of responses from the statement, ‘I don’t know anything at all’ about Muslims, to statements that indicated that they had learned about Islam from family and friends.

The comparative results to this question are presented in the following graph.



Only 2.7% of the staff respondents and no community respondents stated that they had no knowledge about Muslims. More than 70% of the community respondent and 80% of the staff respondents stated that their knowledge of Muslims came primarily

from the media. This explains why the media is such a concern to Australian Muslim leaders promoting a peaceful image of Islamic groups in society.

Because respondents were able to choose as many answers as they believed were applicable, the heavy bias towards the media was tempered somewhat by the fact that 27.4% of staff and 43% of the community gained a better understanding of Islam from friends, and 43.7% and 55.3% respectively from observing people in the neighbourhood. In addition, 44.7% of the staff and 54.7% of the community indicated that their knowledge comes from their own experiences. Approximately one third of respondents were influenced by books they had read.

Again, community respondents in the Northcote SLA appear to have a higher level of interaction with people of Muslim background than those in the Preston SLA and it can be observed in this section that a greater proportion of respondents from Northcote gather information regarding Muslims from a wider variety of sources. The exception to this is in the area of family or extended family where respondents from the Preston SLA had greater contact than those from Northcote SLA.

A breakdown of the community survey by region is presented in the following table.

#### Source of Information Regarding Muslim Groups in Australia

*(Number and percent of total persons)*

<i>Source</i>	<i>Darebin</i>		<i>Northcote</i>	<i>Preston</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>
The media (TV, press, radio)	214	71.3%	77.0%	68.4%
Books you read	115	38.3%	49.2%	32.2%
Observing people in the neighbourhood	131	43.7%	53.7%	38.2%
Friends	129	43.0%	53.5%	37.0%
Family or extended family	45	15.0%	8.6%	18.4%
My own life experiences	164	54.7%	62.2%	50.5%
Other	48	16.0%	18.8%	14.3%

#### 5.4.2 Interaction with Muslims

To gain an even deeper understanding of intercultural relations, *and* to test the results from the previous questions, respondents were asked to nominate situations where they were most likely to associate with persons from a Muslim background. Responses are compared in the following table.

<b>Places you associate with persons of Muslim background</b>					
<b>Darebin City Council/Deakin University Community Diversity Survey 2005</b>					
<i>(Number and percent of total persons)</i>					
<i>Location</i>	<i>Darebin</i>		<i>Northcote</i>	<i>Preston</i>	<i>Darebin</i>
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Council*</i>
At work	119	39.7%	47.0%	35.8%	91.6%
Through my family and relatives	41	13.7%	12.4%	14.3%	51.9%
With neighbours	47	15.7%	18.8%	13.9%	59.5%
Through my children's school	51	17.0%	16.1%	17.5%	26.7%
Through friends	92	30.7%	40.1%	25.4%	69.1%
Through school/Tafe/University	45	15.0%	15.5%	14.9%	19.8%
At public functions	76	25.3%	29.1%	23.3%	61.8%
Through my social group	50	16.7%	26.8%	11.3%	42.7%
Not at all	34	11.3%	17.8%	7.7%	1.1%
I don't know anyone	57	19.0%	19.4%	18.8%	0.0%
Other	8	2.7%	4.8%	1.6%	1.9%

*(\*) Survey of Darebin City Council employees*

Staff reported greater interactions with persons of a Muslim background across all categories. For the staff, the highest scores (91.6%) were applied to having interaction at work, compared to 39.7% of the community respondents. 51.9% of the staff interact with Muslim neighbours and 69.1% interact through friends, compared with 13.7% and 30.7% respectively of community respondents. 42.7% of staff interact with persons of a Muslim background through their social group compared with 16.7% of the community. 19.0% of community respondents did not have any interaction with Muslims, compared with 0.0% of the staff respondents.

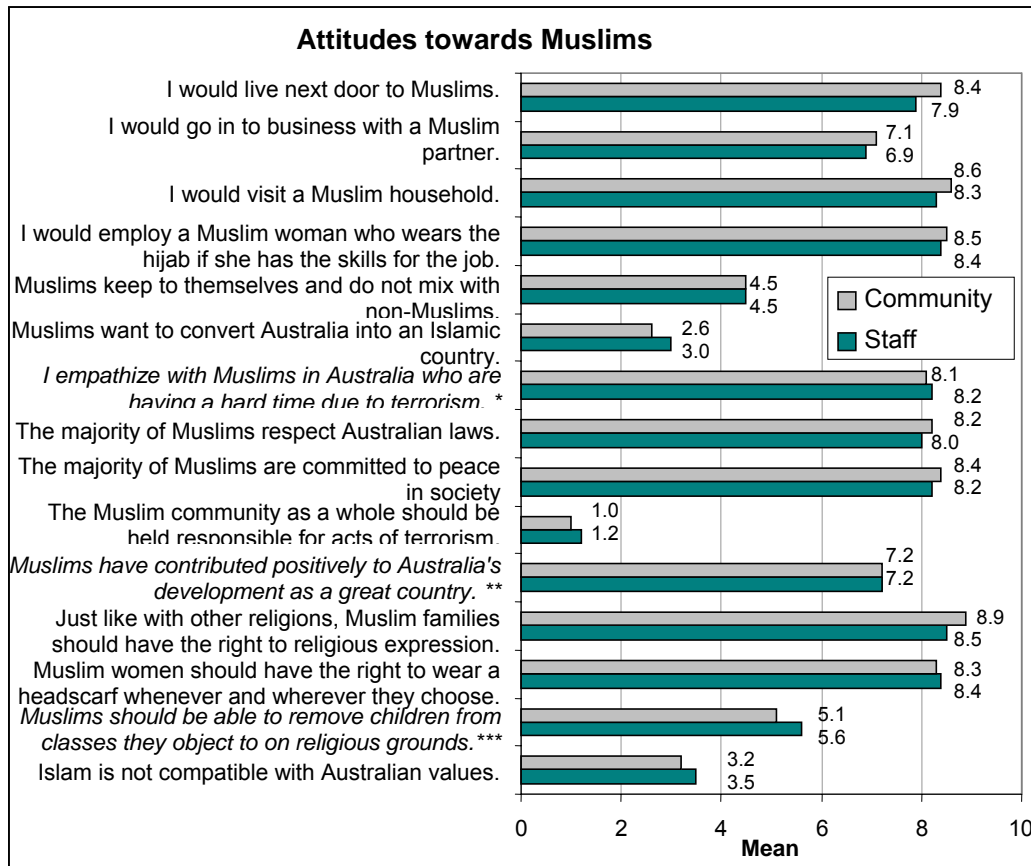
Community respondents reported a lower level of interaction with Muslims specifically than with people from different cultural backgrounds as outlined in 5.3.2. This is, in part, due to the fact that Darebin is a very culturally diverse community and that the Muslim population is only approximately 4.2% of the total population (2001 Census).

The results again differ between precincts. Respondents in the Northcote SLA had a higher level of interaction with Muslims through friends, at work and through social groups than respondents from the Preston SLA. However, respondents from Northcote were also more likely to have no interaction and not to know anyone from a Muslim background. Respondents in the Preston SLA were more likely to interact with Muslims through family and relatives and through their children's school.

### 5.4.3 Attitudes towards Muslims

Respondents were then asked on a scale of 0 to 10 about their level of agreement with a range of specific statements formulated to test their perceptions of Muslim groups in the Darebin community and their knowledge and understanding of Islam. The sentiment of each of these statements, both positive and negative, was taken from opinion pieces published in *The Age* and *The Herald Sun* shortly after the London subway bombings in July 2005. They touched on various issues ranging from the question of whether or not Islam is compatible with democracy, the perception of

Muslim women who choose to wear a veil or hijab and the logic of blaming all members of a particular group for the actions of extremists.



\* Full text is: I empathize with Muslims in Australia who are having a hard time due to international events of terrorism

\*\* Full text is: Muslim individuals and groups have contributed positively to Australia's development as a great country

\*\*\* Full text is: Muslim families should be able to keep their children out of certain classes to which they object to for religious reasons

These fifteen statements can be divided into four broad categories:

- statements about the behaviour of individuals,
- statements about the rights of Muslims,
- statements about Muslim Groups,
- statements about international terrorism and safety.

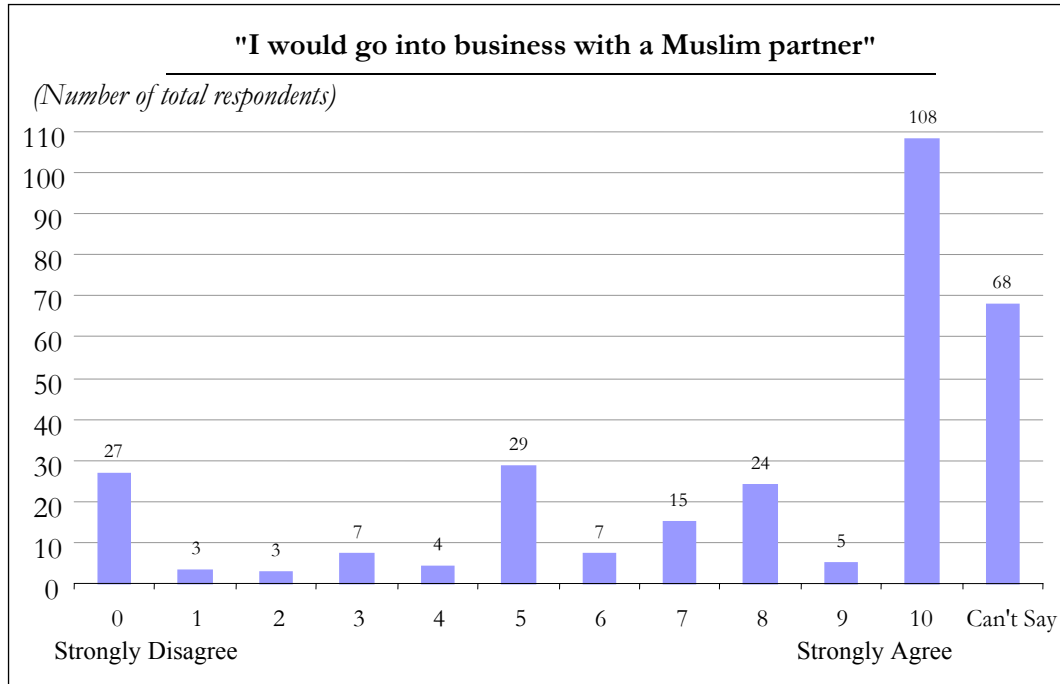
These four categories are each explored below.

*a. Statements about the behaviour of individuals*

According to the survey data collected, the majority of respondents are very comfortable having contact with, interacting with or employing Muslims. Respondents overall strongly agreed that they would live next door to a Muslim with a community rating of 8.39 and a staff rating of 7.9 out of a possible 10. Even more respondents were comfortable with the idea of visiting a Muslim home, with this statement receiving a community rating of 8.64 and a staff rating of 8.3. Community respondents in the Northcote SLA had a stronger level of agreement than those in the Preston SLA and NESB respondents had a significantly lower level of agreement than ESB respondents (7.80 compared to 8.89).

With regard to employment issues, nearly 80% of the respondents responded that they would indeed employ a woman who wore a *hijab*, provided she had the skills for the job. Because the support for this statement is very high, it can be posited that there is a high level of agreement across the community on this issue.

Respondents were less sure they would go into business with a Muslim. The histogram below shows the breakdown of responses to this question in the community survey:



Overall, the scores are reasonably high and receive a rating of 7.14.

Having said this, it should be noted that 19% rated their agreement between 0 and 4, with 9% choosing the score of 0. This indicates that while most people would be comfortable to go into business with a Muslim, a significant proportion of the community would be uncomfortable with such a decision.

The difference in responses between the decision to hire a women wearing a headscarf and going into business with a Muslim could reflect a lack of understanding about whether or not Muslim groups have the same work ethnics as mainstream Australia. It could also be that the decision to go into business with another party always involves more risk than hiring someone into the workforce and would therefore require more thought no matter what the background.

These results indicate that while some of these respondents would most likely choose *not* to go into a partnership with a Muslim for discriminatory reasons, others might make a positive assessment of the individual with whom they have entered negotiations.

*b. Statements about the rights of Muslims*

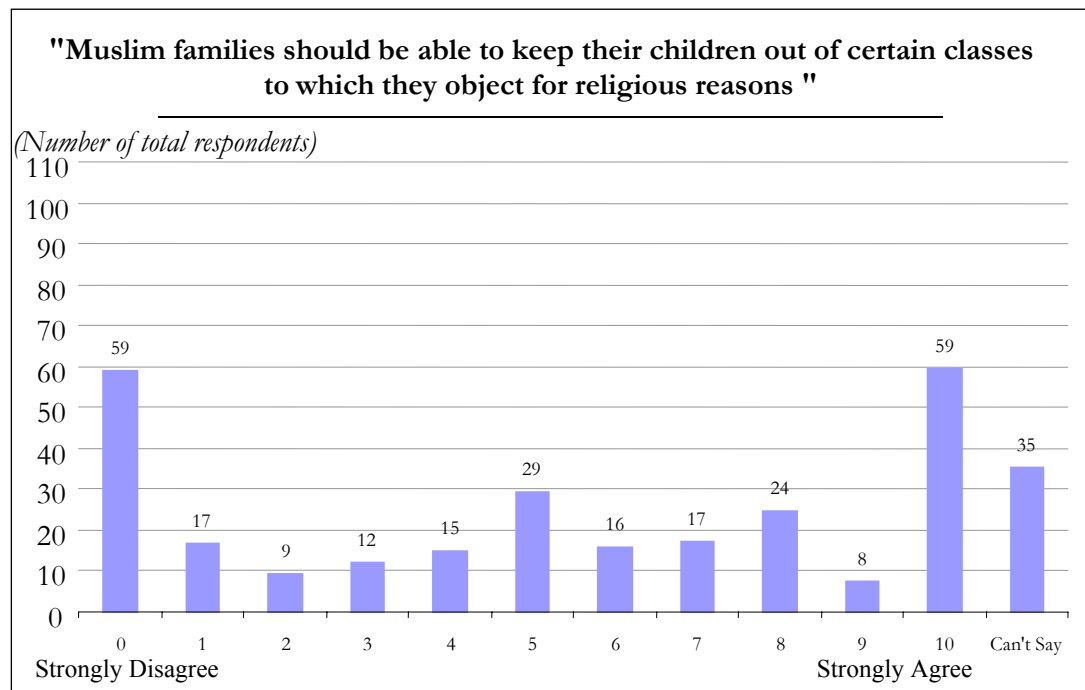
Community and staff respondents displayed high levels of support for equitable rights for Muslims. Consistent with the responses to other questions, the majority of

respondents agreed strongly that Muslim should have the right to wear headscarfs whenever and wherever they chose and that Muslims should have the right to religious expression.

The idea that Muslims should have the right to religious expression was the statement with the highest level of agreement of any statement regarding Muslims (with a community mean of 8.86 and a staff mean of 8.4). While ESB and Northcote SLA respondents had a slightly higher level of agreement than Preston SLA and NESB respondents, agreement was strong across all groups.

This said, it must be noted that there are limits to what people view as minority rights. For example, staff and community respondents were extremely divided over whether Muslim families should have the right to keep their children out of classes for religious reasons, with a community mean of 5.08 and a staff mean of 5.6.

The aggregate of responses from the community survey are presented in the following graph.



Interestingly, while responses peaked at 0 and 10, a greater number of respondents than the total specifying the peak values designated values broadly distributed between 0 and 10. This split displays a serious attitudinal division on this topic within the community.

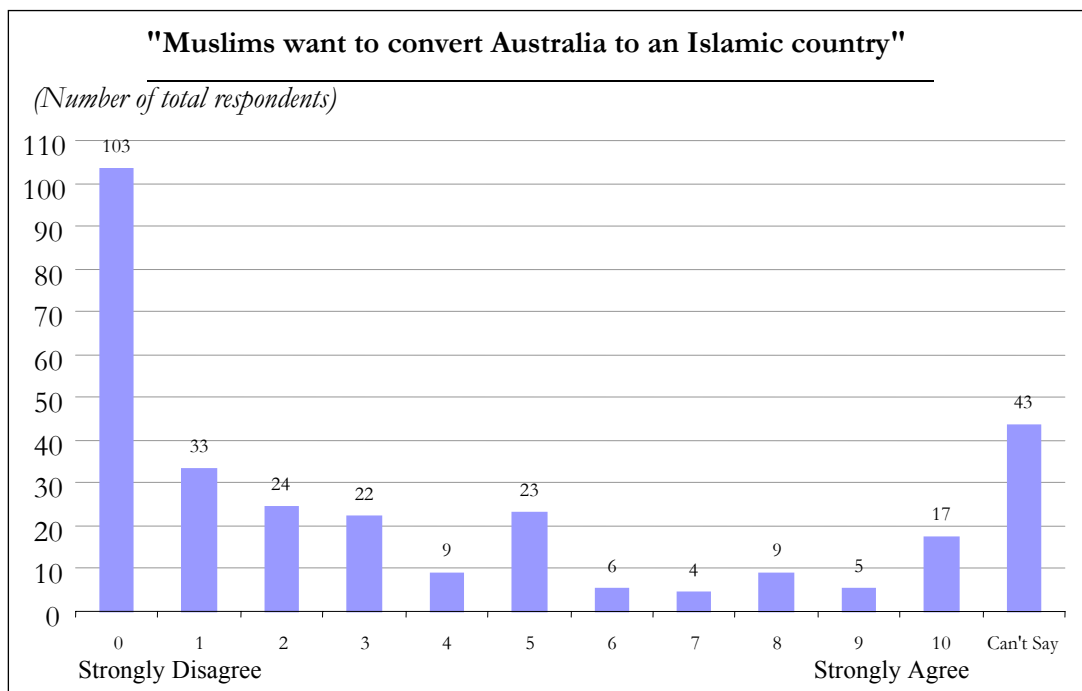
In fairness, these opinions could be explained in a variety of ways and may not indicate views especially discriminatory towards Muslims. For example, some people might respond according to their belief that any parent, whatever their religious and/or cultural background, should have this prerogative. Others might respond in the negative, not out of a lack of sensitivity for Islamic ideals, but because they were concerned about how this type of policy would impact on the overall curriculum of a particular school.

*c. Statements about Muslim groups*

A number of the statements were related to perceptions of Muslims as a whole. The statements ‘the majority of Muslims are committed to peace in society’ and ‘the majority of Muslims respect Australian laws’ both received high levels of agreement from respondents. More than 70% of community respondents rated their agreement with the statements between 8 and 10, which indicates that there is strong, community-wide support for both statements. Likewise the staff survey resulted in means of 8.2 and 8.0 for each statement respectively.

Some respondents were less certain about the statement regarding the positive contribution of Muslims to Australia’s development, with the mean score being 7.17 in the community survey and 7.2 in the staff survey. While these scores are reasonably high and certainly not cause for concern, agreement with this statement is lower than with the other statements. This could mark a lack of knowledge about the history of Muslim groups in Australia stemming from the arrival of Afghan Cameleers in the 1800s.

An additional statement tested people’s reactions to the perceived increase in migration from Muslim countries and its impact on Australia. Even here, most respondents displayed quite tolerant views and did not consider Islam a threat to Australia or view Islam as incompatible with Australian values. The majority of respondents disagreed with the more confrontational statements, such as ‘Muslims want to convert Australia to an Islamic country’.

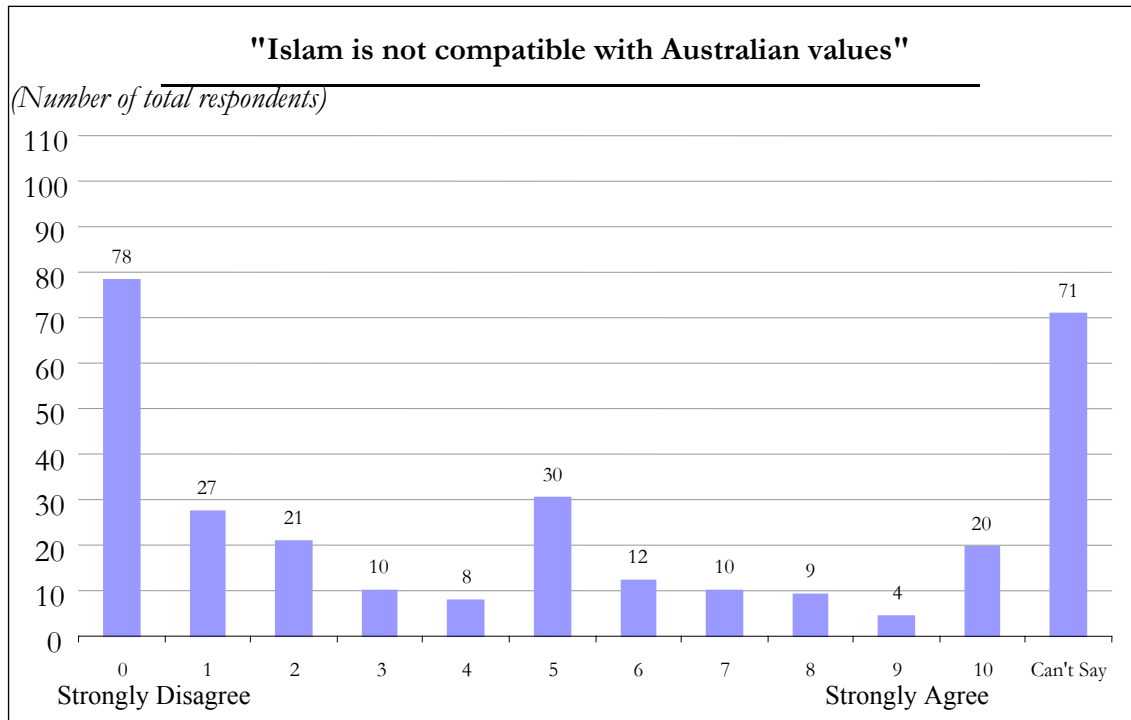


This statement received a community mean of 2.56 and a staff mean of 3.0. The spread of responses to this statement from the community survey are shown in the graph on previous page.

The significant portion of responses indicating they ‘can’t say’ could suggest a number of things: that respondents were uninformed about Muslims in general, that

respondents were unwilling to give support for a negative statement about Muslim in a face-to-face survey, or that respondents were unwilling to generalise about Muslims and what may be their diverse views on Islamic law and society.

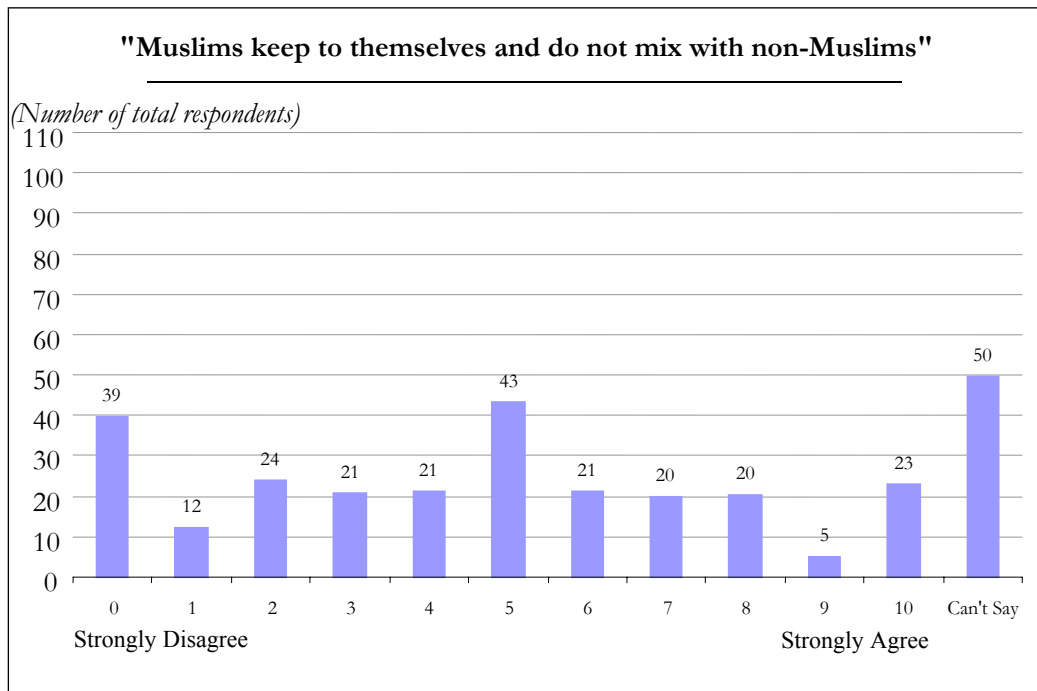
The statement, 'Islam is not compatible with Australian values', similarly received a community mean of 3.19 and a staff mean of 3.5. Northcote SLA respondents disagreed even more strongly with an average score of just 1.87. The aggregate of responses are categorised in the following table.



Again, the significant portion of responses indicating they 'can't say' could suggest a number of things: that respondents were uninformed about Muslims in general, that respondents were unwilling to give support for a negative statement about Muslims in a face-to-face survey, or that respondents were unwilling to generalise about Muslims and that different interpretations of Islam could have different degrees of compatibility with Australian values. Similarly, it could reflect an unwillingness to generalise about the meaning of Australian values.

The final statement in this section, 'Muslims keep to themselves and do not mix with non-Muslims', received a mean score of 4.5 in both surveys. The aggregate of responses to this statement are categorised in the following table.





It should also be noted that one sixth of respondents selected ‘can’t say’ as their response. Again, this could suggest a number of things: that respondents were uninformed about Muslims in general, that respondents were unwilling to give support for a negative statement about Muslims in a face-to-face survey, or that respondents were unwilling to generalise about Muslims and what might be a range of social habits they exhibit.

In general comments, a number of statements were directly related to the debate about integration versus assimilation. One respondent made it clear that any migrant that did not want to assimilate should be sent home. Several more respondents asserted that without the assimilation of migrants, the Australian system ‘will never work.’ One respondent asserted that it was ‘disappointing’ that some groups in society are not interested in learning about or adapting to the Australian way of life. Another comment stated ‘It is important that everyone respects and abides by our laws and makes every effort to integrate.’ It is unclear if these comments referred to Muslims in particular.

*d. Statements about international terrorism and safety*

The final two questions related to the impact of international incidents of terrorism on Australia. The majority of respondents (over 70%) strongly agreed that they empathised with Muslims having a hard time due to international terrorism, with a community mean of 8.1 and a staff mean of 8.2. Similarly, respondents strongly disagreed that the Muslim community as a whole should be held responsible for acts of terrorism with a community mean of 0.96 and a staff mean of 1.2. A number of comments asserted that Australian Muslims are treated unfairly in the current political environment, especially as the majority ‘were fine’ and deserving of respect.

These results suggest that there is a high degree of support for the various Muslim communities within the Darebin community at this time of heightened focus upon security.

#### **5.4.3.1      *A note on variations between staff and community views***

When presented with specific statements about their perceptions of Muslims, staff and community respondents exhibited a high level of tolerance and understanding of the Muslim communities in Darebin, but there were slight divergences.

Staff respondents, for example, reacted slightly more positively than community respondents to statements related to the right of Muslim women to wear headscarves whenever and wherever they want (staff mean of 8.43; community mean of 8.30) and to the right of Muslim parents to keep their children out of classes to which they object (staff mean of 5.63; community mean of 5.08). The scores were reversed, however, in relation to a Muslim's right to religious expression (staff mean of 8.53; community mean of 8.86).

Community respondents responded slightly more positively than the staff respondents to statements related to the idea of visiting a Muslim household (community mean of 8.64; staff mean of 8.26) and living next door to a Muslim family (community mean of 8.39; staff mean of 7.89). The community respondents also gave slightly more support to the prospect of hiring a woman who wears *hijab* (community mean of 8.53; staff mean of 8.4) or going into business with a Muslim partner (community mean of 7.14 mean; staff mean of 6.92).

There was near unanimity for certain statements. For example, similar responses were given by both groups in support of Muslims who have found themselves targeted because of international events of terrorism. The response to this question was a staff mean of 8.20 compared with a community mean of 8.10. Slightly more community respondents believed that Muslim groups respect Australian laws (community mean of 8.17; staff mean of 8.01) and that they are committed to peace (community mean of 8.42; staff mean of 8.16). The scores were again almost identical when discussing the positive role played by Muslims in Australian history (community mean of 7.17; staff mean of 7.20).

By contrast, a staff mean of 1.24 and a community mean of 0.96 were prepared to say that Muslims as a whole should be held responsible for the acts of extremist Muslim terrorists. Also significant were the scores for the statements that Muslims primarily keep to themselves and do not mix with the mainstream (staff mean of 2.53; community mean of 4.51), that Muslims wanted to convert Australia to Islam (staff mean of 3.01; community mean of 2.56), and that Islam is not compatible with Australian values (staff mean of 3.49, community mean of 3.19).

It is important to note at this point that the different survey methodologies used could have produced different results. When comparing the staff and community scores to these statements, there appears to be marginal support by Darebin City Council employees for what could reasonably be classified as negative statements about Muslim groups in Australia.

It is equally possible that the electronic and hardcopy versions of this survey allowed respondents the feeling of more confidentiality in their answers. As these surveys included sensitive questions that force people to express a personal opinion on

controversial issues it is possible that the staff respondents could have been more honest in their responses.

While confidentiality was an important feature of both the internal *and* the external survey, the Council employees were not providing answers to another person, face-to-face. Hence, the possibility exists that some people may have been reluctant to express negative opinions in this section for fear of the interviewer's reaction. Whilst interviewers were trained and equipped with the required skills, there is a tendency for people to worry about what another person will think of them if they express views that others might regard as intolerant.

There is another possibility. Because Council employees are more likely than community respondents to come into contact with different minority groups on a daily basis it is possible that a percentage of Council staff have become cynical about the current political environment. These scores could therefore denote their understanding of the complexity of the situation, rather than denoting a particular negative attitude to cultural diversity and minority rights.

These slight reservations are not meant to negate the results generated, which characterise the Darebin community as conducive to intercultural harmony and understanding. They are, by contrast, intended to illustrate the complexity of the situation and to highlight the challenges that diversity poses for the equitable delivery of services.

#### **5.4.3.2 Variations in views according to background, region and education**

The aggregate community scores of all fifteen statements relating to Muslims are presented in the following table. It includes sub-analysis according to whether or not the respondent is from an English speaking or non-English speaking background. The data is further divided according to where the respondent lives in the City of Darebin. (See table next page)

While not agreeing on every statement equally, people from an English speaking background and Northcote SLA respondents tend to hold slightly more tolerant views regarding Muslims than people from a non-English speaking background and Preston SLA respondents.

In the staff survey there is a slight correlation between the levels of education obtained by each respondent and their respective perceptions of Muslims. The distinction is also of slight significance in relation to opinions about the increasing levels of diversity in the City of Darebin. A second sub-analysis based on the respondent's country of origin has also been made.

In order to maximise the representative nature of the survey data, distinctions were made between 'higher qualified' respondents with any type of University degree and 'lower qualified' respondents who had other qualifications such as a diploma, trade certificate or no further qualifications at all.

## Agreement with statements regarding Muslims

(Index scores 0 to 10)

Statement	Northcote Score	Preston Score	NESB Score	ESB Score
I would live next door to Muslims	8.58 <b>8.98</b> 9.38	7.63 <b>8.04</b> 8.46	7.27 <b>7.80</b> 8.32	8.55 <b>8.89</b> 9.23
I would go into business with a Muslim partner	7.15 <b>7.84</b> 8.53	6.16 <b>6.74</b> 7.32	5.74 <b>6.48</b> 7.21	7.36 <b>7.87</b> 8.39
I would visit a Muslim household	8.97 <b>9.28</b> 9.60	7.90 <b>8.28</b> 8.66	7.79 <b>8.26</b> 8.73	8.67 <b>8.98</b> 9.29
I would employ a woman who wore the hijab if she had the skills for the job	8.53 <b>8.96</b> 9.38	7.88 <b>8.30</b> 8.73	7.53 <b>8.07</b> 8.61	8.67 <b>9.01</b> 9.36
Muslims keep to themselves and do not mix with non-Muslims	3.52 <b>4.09</b> 4.65	4.23 <b>4.73</b> 5.24	4.40 <b>4.99</b> 5.59	3.58 <b>4.10</b> 4.62
Muslims want to convert Australia into an Islamic country	1.39 <b>1.87</b> 2.35	2.43 <b>2.97</b> 3.51	2.15 <b>2.77</b> 3.40	1.90 <b>2.41</b> 2.92
I empathize with Muslims around Australia who are having a hard time due to international events of terrorism	7.84 <b>8.31</b> 8.78	7.59 <b>7.98</b> 8.37	7.03 <b>7.58</b> 8.12	8.18 <b>8.50</b> 8.83
The majority of Muslims respect Australian laws	8.39 <b>8.78</b> 9.18	7.43 <b>7.83</b> 8.23	7.01 <b>7.54</b> 8.08	8.27 <b>8.62</b> 8.96
The majority of Muslims are committed to peace in society	8.55 <b>8.91</b> 9.26	7.80 <b>8.15</b> 8.50	7.45 <b>7.90</b> 8.36	8.65 <b>8.92</b> 9.20
The Muslim community as a whole should be held responsible for acts of terrorism	0.36 <b>0.69</b> 1.01	0.80 <b>1.11</b> 1.42	1.04 <b>1.47</b> 1.90	0.35 <b>0.61</b> 0.86
Muslim individuals and groups have contributed positively to Australia's development as a great country	7.58 <b>8.08</b> 8.57	6.26 <b>6.71</b> 7.15	6.36 <b>6.91</b> 7.47	6.97 <b>7.43</b> 7.88
Just like other religions, Muslim families should have the right to religious expression	9.01 <b>9.29</b> 9.56	8.32 <b>8.63</b> 8.94	8.23 <b>8.61</b> 8.98	8.87 <b>9.14</b> 9.40
Muslim women should have the right to wear headscarfs whenever and where ever they choose	8.55 <b>8.93</b> 9.31	7.51 <b>7.94</b> 8.37	7.23 <b>7.75</b> 8.26	8.45 <b>8.82</b> 9.20
Muslim families should be able to keep their children out of certain classes to which they object for religious reasons	5.38 <b>6.09</b> 6.81	3.93 <b>4.51</b> 5.09	3.49 <b>4.16</b> 4.83	5.51 <b>6.11</b> 6.72
Islam is not compatible with Australian values	1.68 <b>2.25</b> 2.81	3.14 <b>3.73</b> 4.32	2.97 <b>3.66</b> 4.35	2.22 <b>2.78</b> 3.34

The following table uses educational categories to subdivide staff responses to statements on cultural diversity, as discussed in 5.3.1:

Level of Education and Perceptions of Cultural Diversity	All	Qualifications	
		Lower	Higher
Darebin is a diverse community that incorporates people from many different cultural backgrounds	9.0	8.9	9.3
The level of diversity found in the Darebin community makes it a better place to live	8.1	7.6	8.6
The different ethnic groups in Darebin get along well and mix easily in the community	6.4	6.3	6.5

With regard to the general questions on cultural diversity, the higher educated respondents scored *slightly* higher on all three questions. The significance of these differences is further highlighted when sub-analysis is undertaken according to the respondents ‘country of birth’.

In analysing the responses of those born in Oceania compared to those born ‘elsewhere’, by contrast, there is no apparent relationship:

Country of Birth and Perceptions of Cultural Diversity	All	Born	
		Oceania	Elsewhere
Darebin is a diverse community that incorporates people from many different cultural backgrounds	9.0	9.0	9.0
The level of diversity found in the Darebin community makes it a better place to live	8.1	8.0	8.2
The different ethnic groups in Darebin get along well and mix easily in the community	6.4	6.3	6.8

Both types of sub-analysis reveal different patterns when considering perceptions of Muslims. Overall, less educated staff exhibited a lower level of tolerance toward the Muslim community than higher educated staff. Consider the statistics presented in the following table.

Levels of education and perceptions of Australian Muslims	Staff	Qualifications	
		Lower	Higher
I would live next door to Muslims	7.9	7.08	8.82
I would go in to business with a Muslim partner	6.9	5.84	8.18
I would visit a Muslim household	8.3	7.40	9.20
I would employ a Muslim woman who wears the hijab if she has the skills for the job	8.4	7.63	9.20
Muslims keep to themselves and do not mix with non-Muslims	4.5	5.60	3.31
Muslims want to convert Australia into an Islamic country	3.0	4.14	1.87
I empathize with Muslims in Australia who are having a hard time due to international events of terrorism	8.2	7.67	8.84
The majority of Muslims respect Australian laws	8.0	7.17	8.98
The majority of Muslims are committed to peace in society	8.2	7.43	9.03
The Muslim community as a whole should be held responsible for acts of terrorism	1.2	1.77	0.76
Muslim individuals and groups have contributed positively to Australia’s development as a great country	7.2	6.11	8.43
Just like with other religions, Muslim families should have the right to religious expression	8.5	7.91	9.26
Muslim women should have the right to wear a headscarf whenever and wherever they choose	8.4	7.73	9.29
Muslim families should be able to keep their children out of certain classes to which they object to for religious reasons	5.6	5.32	6.12
Islam is not compatible with Australian values	3.5	4.35	2.48

In contrast to the findings of the sub-analysis done in reference to staff perceptions of cultural diversity, there is also a correlation between a person’s country of birth and a more negative perception of Muslim groups in Australia. According to the survey data, staff respondents born outside of Oceania are again slightly less tolerant than those born in Australia. (Refer following table)

Country of birth and perceptions of Australian Muslims	Staff	Country of Birth	
		Oceania	Elsewhere
I would live next door to Muslims	7.9	8.16	7.11
I would go in to business with a Muslim partner	6.9	7.2	6.11
I would visit a Muslim household	8.3	8.51	7.53
I would employ a Muslim woman who wears the hijab if she has the skills for the job	8.4	8.57	7.91
Muslims keep to themselves and do not mix with non-Muslims	4.5	4.60	4.34
Muslims want to convert Australia into an Islamic country	3.0	2.87	3.40
I empathize with Muslims in Australia who are having a hard time due to international events of terrorism	8.2	8.35	7.76
The majority of Muslims respect Australian laws	8.0	8.14	7.66
The majority of Muslims are committed to peace in society	8.2	8.34	7.69
The Muslim community as a whole should be held responsible for acts of terrorism	1.2	1.22	1.31
Muslim individuals and groups have contributed positively to Australia’s development as a great country	7.2	7.32	6.85
Just like with other religions, Muslim families should have the right to religious expression	8.5	8.67	8.36
Muslim women should have the right to wear a headscarf whenever and wherever they choose	8.4	8.62	7.91
Muslim families should be able to keep their children out of certain classes to which they object to for religious reasons	5.6	6.02	4.64
Islam is not compatible with Australian values	3.5	3.50	3.45

Neither sub-analysis is particularly surprising and only confirmed expectations. It often happens, for example, that people with higher levels of education have higher levels of support for cultural diversity. It also follows that they would have higher levels of acceptance for the different cultural practices of Muslim groups. To reiterate points made by Katherine Betts (2005) 'more educated people (especially people working in the social professions) are consistently more favourably disposed to high immigration than are less educated people', as well as other issues related to multiculturalism and cultural diversity.

It is also not surprising that people born outside Australia would show high levels of support for cultural diversity, since they themselves add to the diversified population of Australia. The more interesting statistic is that they showed consistently less tolerant views of Muslim groups. The reasons for this could range from negative experiences with Muslim groups from their home countries or elsewhere overseas. It could alternatively reflect a different understanding of what is required of migrant groups that choose to live in a country with very different cultural practices from their country of origin.

## **5.5 Views on the Role of Local Government**

There were two final issues explored in the staff and community surveys that were handled differently out of necessity. Both sections were related specifically to the role of the Darebin City Council and the diversification of centralised services to serve a diverse community.

The reason why different sets of questions were needed in these two sections are related to the fact that Council employees are more likely to have first-hand knowledge of what the Darebin City Council has to offer than many community respondents. Council employees are moreover providing an insider's perspective to the role of local government, while the community respondents provide the perspective of the consumer. Despite the different questions however, the general issues explored are similar.

### **5.5.1 Council staff on the role of Darebin council**

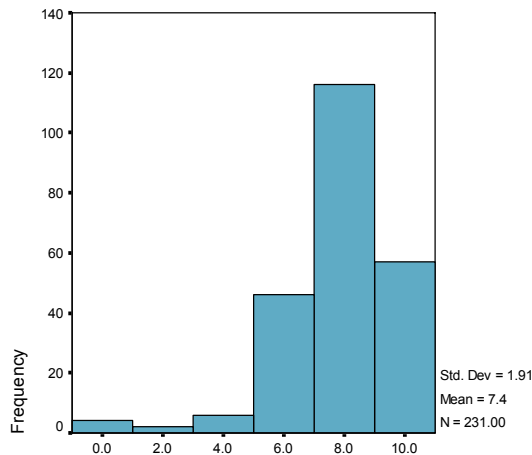
As highlighted in Chapter 4, the Darebin City Council has embraced the high levels of diversity within the extended community by implementing progressive policies and programs meant to foster more intercultural harmony and understanding. One of the ways that they have done this is to incorporate business principles into their core Council philosophy related to the customisation of centralised services.

The question, however, is what this means in practice? For example, even though the Darebin City Council has already formulated various multicultural policies, are they both effective and efficient? And if so, is this approach supported by all Council employees and implemented in practice?

One of the primary questions related to this issue was to explore whether or not Council employees thought Darebin's multicultural policies had been effective in

promoting harmony between the different ethnic and religious groups in the City of Darebin. The majority of staff responded favourably to this scaled question and answered between eight and ten, as highlighted in the following graph:

### **How effective are Darebin City Council's multicultural policies?**

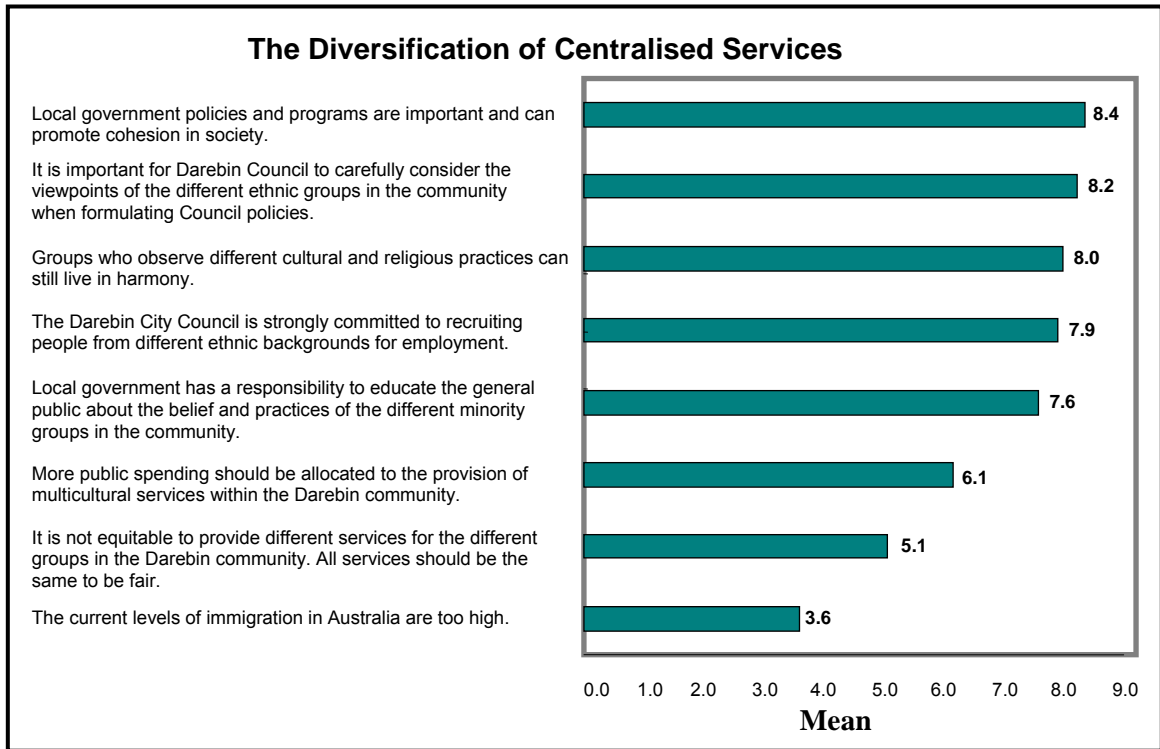


The mean for this question fell at 7.37, which indicates that overall, the Darebin City Council is perceived as an effective body for handling intercultural issues. At the same time, it leaves room for improvement and continued planning.

To further explore these attitudes, staff respondents were prompted to score on a 0 to 10 scale their level of agreement with a selection of statements related to the diversification of centralised services:

- It is not equitable to provide different services for the different groups in the Darebin community. All services should be the same to be fair.
- More public spending should be allocated to the provision of multicultural services within the Darebin community.
- Local government has a responsibility to educate the general public about the beliefs and practices of the different minority groups in the community.
- The Darebin City Council is strongly committed to recruiting people from different ethnic backgrounds for employment.
- Groups who observe different cultural and religious practices can still live in harmony.
- It is important for the Darebin City Council to consider carefully the viewpoints of the different ethnic groups in the community when formulating Council policies.
- Local government policies and programs are important and can promote cohesion in society.
- The current levels of immigration are too high.

Staff responses are presented in the following graph according to the levels of support shown for each point:



With means between 8.0 and 8.4, the Council employees strongly believed that local City Councils had a role to play in promoting intercultural harmony and supported policies aimed at ensuring equitable representation and increasing communication between the Council and the community.

There was also strong support for the Darebin City Council to play an active role in educating the mainstream population about the different minorities, and a strong consensus that to do this, more public spending would have to be allocated to multicultural activities.

However, with a mean of 5.1, the staff exhibited slight ambiguity on the question about the provision of differentiated services to the different groups. There are several possible explanations for this. For one, there could be disagreement on which services should be differentiated and which should be the same for all parties involved. While some might agree that people with a disability should always receive the appropriate services, for example, they might not believe that all religious preferences should be the responsibility of the Council. It could also be that some respondents feel that too many services have been customised to the detriment of the mainstream community.

### 5.5.2 Community views on the capacity and role of local government

Community respondents were asked about the most appropriate role to be assumed by local government when dealing with cultural diversity, and about which



responsibilities should be directed towards the local city council. It should be noted that this section differed from the Staff survey since community respondents would not have first-hand knowledge and understanding of Council activities, policies and programs.

Having said this, the first question was the same as that for the staff: ‘On a scale of 0 to 10, how would you rate Darebin Council’s capacity to promote intercultural harmony and understanding?’

The second question was specific to community respondents: ‘How important is it for Darebin City Council to play a role in promoting harmony between diverse ethnic groups?’

The responses to both of these statements are presented in the table below.

Capacity and importance of promoting inter-cultural harmony and understanding (Index scores 0 to 10)			
Statement	N	Darebin	
			Score
Capacity to promote inter-cultural harmony and understanding	228	Lower	6.65
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>6.93</b>
		Upper	7.21
Importance for Council to play a role in promoting harmony between diverse ethnic groups	284	Lower	8.55
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>8.75</b>
		Upper	8.95

Respondents on average rated Darebin City Council’s capacity to promote intercultural harmony and understanding significantly lower than the importance of doing so (6.93 compared to 8.75). The score of 6.93 is a solid result, but one that does lead to a consideration of why respondents hold their views.

It is unclear as to why respondents had a lower view of Council’s ability to promote intercultural harmony and understanding, but there are several possible interpretations:

- One possibility is that while the people view the Darebin City Council as progressive and concerned about intercultural harmony, they may still view the responsibilities of the Council as related to the traditional areas of ‘roads, rates and rubbish’.
- Other possible concerns could be related to the perception that if new responsibilities are added to the local city council then funding may be cut from other essential services.
- The general comments also highlight the perception that multicultural policies direct Council attention away from programs that benefit the whole community. Several respondents, for example, made it clear that in their opinions, Council must be careful not to concentrate only on ethnic or Muslim issues and services, and thereby overlook the needs of the mainstream

community. The primary concern was that Council remain committed to programs and policies that also promote the Australian culture and way of life.

- Some community respondents might feel that these issues are not the responsibility of local government and that intercultural harmony between the different groups will eventually even out over time. This view may draw on historical cases of migrant groups that struggled to be accepted into Australian society for some time before achieving successful integration. Many other ethnic groups have struggled to be accepted into Australian society, but that over time, this was accomplished.

### 5.5.3 Community views on diversity and social tension.

To test these attitudes further, community respondents were asked to respond to the same series of questions related to the diversification of centralised services as the staff.

The table below displays the mean scores with the 95% confidence interval for each of the statements with which respondents were asked to rate their agreement.

<u>Agreement with statements</u>			
<u>Darebin City Council/Deakin University Community Diversity Survey 2005</u>			
<i>(index score 0 to 10)</i>			
<i>Statement</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Darebin</i>	
			<i>Score</i>
Because different people have different needs, it is important for service providers to provide differentiated services to suit these.	287	Lower	7.75
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>8.00</b>
		Upper	8.25
Groups who observe different cultural practices can still live in harmony.	294	Lower	8.13
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>8.37</b>
		Upper	8.61
These days, you can't trust most people.	284	Lower	3.82
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>4.20</b>
		Upper	4.58
Social tension is often created in the community because people from different cultural backgrounds are often unsure what to expect from each other.	274	Lower	5.84
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>6.15</b>
		Upper	6.46
It is the responsibility of the mainstream community to learn about the cultural practices of different minority groups, especially at the local level.	281	Lower	5.95
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>6.27</b>
		Upper	6.60
You can trust your neighbours to help you in times of need.	284	Lower	7.04
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>7.32</b>
		Upper	7.61
The current levels of immigration in Australia are too high.	260	Lower	3.17
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.55</b>
		Upper	3.93
Recent overseas events, such as the bombings in New York, Madrid and London have put Australia's social harmony at risk.	287	Lower	5.91
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>6.28</b>
		Upper	6.64

Overall, the majority of the community respondents strongly agreed that different cultural groups can live in harmony, with a mean score of 8.37. Similar levels of support were indicated for the need to differentiate services according to the needs of different groups in the community. This statement received a mean score of 8. Respondents also tended to believe they could trust their neighbours to help in times of need, with more than half rating their agreement between 8 and 10 and the average score being 7.32.

Less agreement was indicated for the idea that social tension might escalate in response to a lack of information about other cultures (mean of 6.15), as well as the question of whether or not the mainstream population should be responsible for learning about minority groups in the community (mean of 6.27). A similar mean score of 6.28 was given to the statement assessing whether or not community respondents believe that recent international events have put Australia's social harmony at risk.

There were variations in response when sub-analysis was undertaken in relation to geographic location and respondent background. This information is outlined in the following table.

<b>Agreement with statements by SLA and language background</b>					
<b><u>Darebin City Council/Deakin University Community Diversity Survey 2005</u></b>					
<i>(index score 0 to 10)</i>					
<i>Statement</i>		<i>Northcote Score</i>	<i>Preston Score</i>	<i>NESB Score</i>	<i>ESB Score</i>
Because different people have different needs, it is important for service providers to provide differentiated services to suit these.	Lower	7.98	7.48	7.48	7.75
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>8.29</b>	<b>7.83</b>	<b>7.84</b>	<b>8.12</b>
	Upper	8.61	8.19	8.19	8.48
Groups who observe different cultural practices can still live in harmony.	Lower	8.26	7.92	7.87	8.10
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>8.58</b>	<b>8.25</b>	<b>8.22</b>	<b>8.44</b>
	Upper	8.89	8.58	8.56	8.79
These days, you can't trust most people.	Lower	2.98	4.07	4.58	2.80
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.55</b>	<b>4.56</b>	<b>5.17</b>	<b>3.26</b>
	Upper	4.13	5.06	5.75	3.72
Social tension is often created in the community because people from different cultural backgrounds are often unsure what to expect from each other.	Lower	5.28	5.98	5.86	5.53
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>5.75</b>	<b>6.39</b>	<b>6.32</b>	<b>5.95</b>
	Upper	6.22	6.79	6.79	6.38
It is the responsibility of the mainstream community to learn about the cultural practices of different minority groups, especially at the local level.	Lower	6.02	5.70	5.84	5.86
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>6.52</b>	<b>6.13</b>	<b>6.35</b>	<b>6.28</b>
	Upper	7.01	6.55	6.86	6.70
You can trust your neighbours to help you in times of need.	Lower	6.99	6.88	6.88	6.87
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>7.42</b>	<b>7.27</b>	<b>7.30</b>	<b>7.27</b>
	Upper	7.84	7.65	7.72	7.67
The current levels of immigration in Australia are too high.	Lower	2.45	3.37	3.24	2.82
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>3.01</b>	<b>3.89</b>	<b>3.81</b>	<b>3.35</b>
	Upper	3.57	4.40	4.37	3.88
Recent overseas events, such as the bombings in New York, Madrid and London have put Australia's social harmony at risk.	Lower	4.90	6.24	6.64	4.99
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>5.50</b>	<b>6.70</b>	<b>7.15</b>	<b>5.50</b>
	Upper	6.09	7.16	7.67	6.00

Community respondents appear divided over the statement: ‘These days you can’t trust most people’. Respondents from non-English-speaking backgrounds and the Preston SLA indicated significantly higher levels of agreement than English-speaking respondents and those from the Northcote SLA. Responses to this statement peaked at 0, 2, 5 and 10, indicating a significant level of variation and disagreement in existing community attitudes.

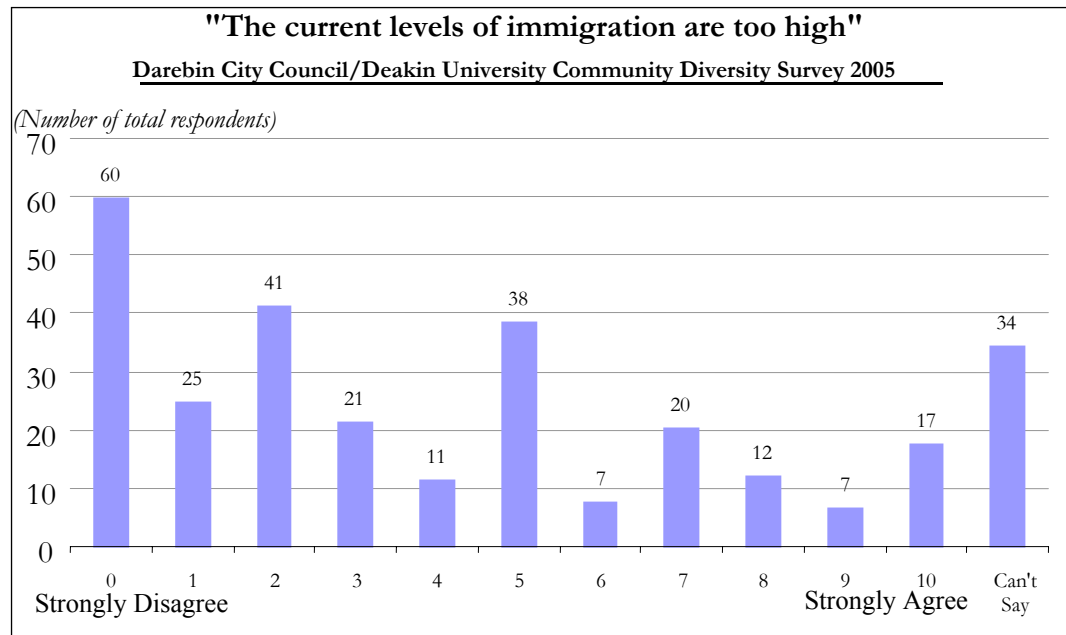
Respondents were also more divided on whether social tension was caused by a lack of cultural understanding between groups. While overall agreement was scored with a municipal rating of 6.15, NESB respondents and respondents from Preston SLA agreed more strongly with the statement than ESB respondents and respondents from Northcote SLA.

Respondents also agreed, but not strongly, that it was the responsibility of the mainstream community to learn about the cultural practices of minorities (6.27). While the majority of respondents scored between 5 and 7, it should be noted that 20% strongly disagreed with this statement. Agreement was slightly higher for NESB and Northcote SLA respondents.

This section presented two further statements to test prevailing social attitudes:

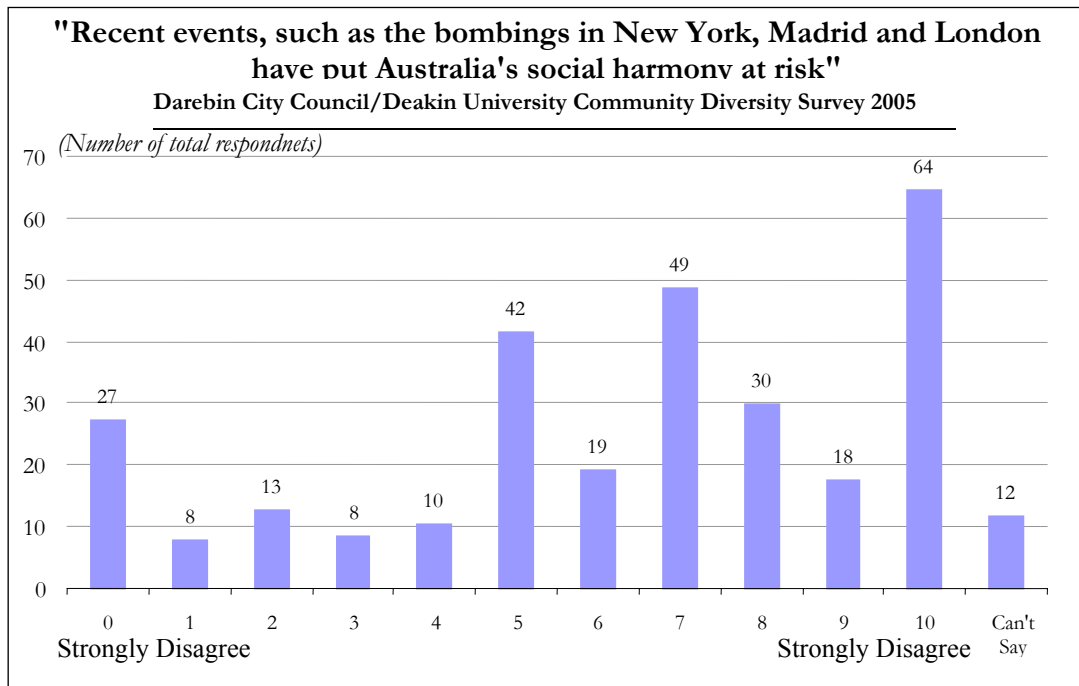
- 1) ‘Are current levels of immigration too high?’
- 2) ‘Have recent terrorist attacks put Australia’s social harmony at risk?’

Overall, respondents generally disagreed with the statement that Australia’s current immigration levels were too high (3.55).



Having said this, 13.8% rated their agreement with this statement between 8 and 10, with the majority of those (17) rated their agreement at 10. Again, Preston SLA and NESB respondents had a slightly higher level of agreement with this statement than Northcote SLA and ESB respondents.

Similar patterns are found for the questions about recent international events and social harmony.

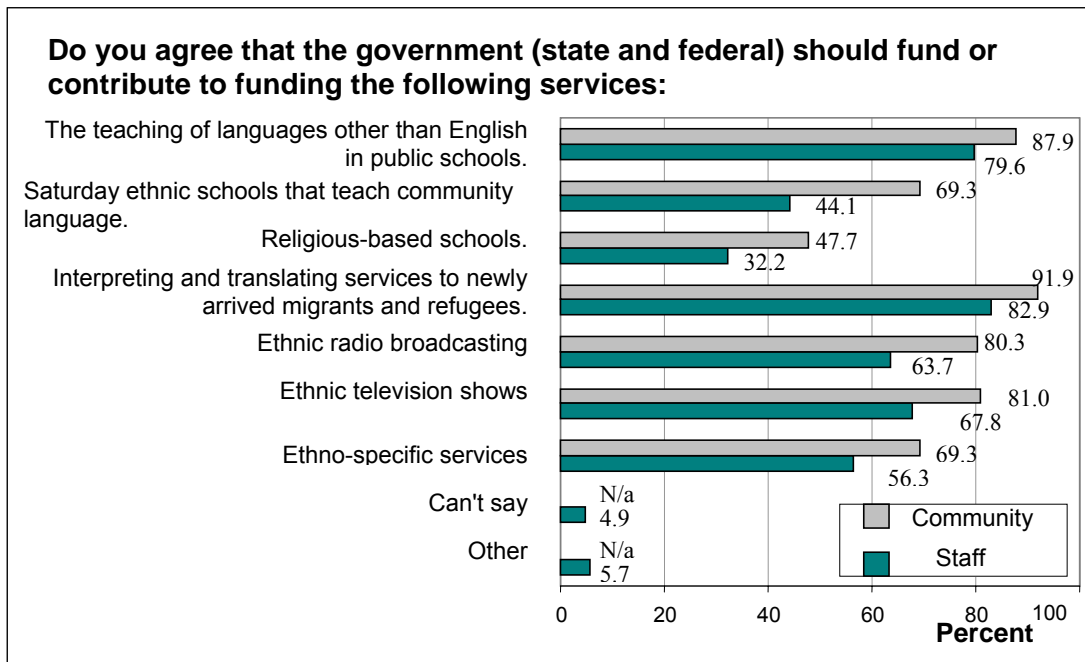


NESB respondents and respondents from the Preston SLA had a significantly higher level of agreement than ESB respondents that recent terrorist attacks had put Australia's social harmony at risk. Respondents appear somewhat divided on this issue, borne out by the fact that responses peaked at 0, 5, 7 and 10, with the largest single group of respondents scoring 10.

Taken together, it appears that there is a lot of ambiguity about these issues. While the community is largely supportive of individual Muslims and their families, there is less agreement about the impact of recent migration patterns on Australia. People are clearly concerned about the current political environment and safety, but they are unsure about how to respond to these concerns.

#### 5.5.4 Government funding of specialised services

Both surveys also explored levels of agreement with state and federal funding by asking whether the government (state and federal) should fund or contribute to particular services. A comparison of staff and community responses is presented in the following graph.



\* Data from the Community Survey –Metropolis Market research

There was overall agreement from the staff that government funding should be provided for Interpreting Services and the teaching of languages other than English (around 80% for both).

By contrast, government funding of religious based schools and Saturday ethnic schools, especially with regard to the teaching a community language in this setting, only scored around 30-40% agreement from staff.

The staff response was further split over how much government funding should be allocated to ethnic radio and television programs and ethno-specific services in the community. This could again reflect the same uncertainty highlighted above about what constitutes an ethno-specific service and what does not.

Comparing these results to the Community survey shows that overall the community has a higher level of agreement across all categories tested. The strongest support was for the teaching of languages other than English in public schools and translation services for newly arrived migrants (87.9% and 91.9% respectively). The community differed most strongly from staff on the funding of ‘Saturday ethnic schools teaching a community language’ which was supported by nearly 70% of community respondents.

One notable exception to support for the funding of services was the funding of religious-based schools. Only 47.7% of community respondents in Darebin supported funding for religious schools. This figure was therefore more in line with the response of staff. Support for government funding of religious schools failed to achieve majority support amongst respondents from the Northcote SLA (41.8%).

It should be noted that the question of government funding of religious schools is a long running debate in the community and relates not only to Muslim schools, but to Catholic, Anglican and other denominational institutions.

### **5.5.5 Activities to promote understanding**

#### **a. Staff views on staff training and community activities**

The Staff Survey next explored the level of training of the respondents by asking if any of the following had been attended:

- equal opportunity training,
- diversity training,
- training in working with interpreters,
- training in preparing documentation for translation,
- community profile seminars,
- breakfast seminars,
- other,
- none of the above.

Of these programs, the majority of the staff had attended equal opportunity training (70.7%) and diversity training (57.2%). Attendance at the other aspects of training ranged between 10% and 30%. Of these, working with interpreters attracted the most participants (30.6%) with community profile seminars (26.6%) and breakfast seminars (20.1%) not far below this average.

17.5% of respondents had not attended any of these seminars during the time of their employment and only 12.2% had attended a seminar on preparing documentation for translation services.

The staff respondents additionally asked to give examples of programs that are beneficial to the Darebin community. Paradoxically, while only 12.2% of the staff had attended the seminar on preparing documents for translation services, the various translation and interpreting services were rated as among the most important services provided by the Darebin City Council. Other services that were highlighted were the multilingual telephone line, multilingual communication services, language aids (written and human), written translation services and training in writing documents for CALD communities.

As highlighted by one respondent, Darebin is effective in part because they have a 'good communications strategy' that operates through inclusive policies. Another respondent also highlighted the importance of 'providing communication to residents/owners in relevant languages for that residence'.

Information sessions were also rated highly by a majority of respondents, in particular those designed to provide information to the mainstream population about the different cultural and religious groups in Darebin. The *most* popular sessions were admittedly those that either included food and/or were held during the day. Additional suggestions included the publication of community profiles for staff information, conferences revolving around cultural diversity and the potential for 'publishing images and stories of people with various ethnic and/or religious backgrounds'.

Of particular interest to staff (perhaps prompted by the topic of this survey) were information sessions about Muslim groups in the Darebin community, the promotion of open days at the local Mosque and prospects for a festival organised during Ramadan to promote the image of Muslim groups in the City of Darebin. The basis of

these suggestions often included references to the Darebin City Council's successful Cramer Street Project in 2004. These interests moreover coincide with requests for the planning and organisation of more inter-faith events, possibly in conjunction with a harmony project.

For many, it was important that interaction and inclusion be the primary basis of organising community events. As argued by one respondent: 'Inservice from different groups in the Darebin community ...provided significant knowledge and understanding about the diversity of communities. My awareness allows me to work more effectively, without judgement and accept different ways of doing things'.

The issue of inclusion was also mentioned in relation to community groups. Among staff suggestions were LOTE playgroups and mother's groups, free English classes for migrants, women only swimming programs, recreational programs for CALD communities and more diversified youth programs.

Other staff respondents focused on the more operational side of the Darebin City Council. Some showed their support for continuing diversity training programs for managers and staff. This was in addition to the staff that highlighted the important role of the Multicultural Affairs Unit and the work of Dalal Smiley (Unit Coordinator), as well as that of the Darebin Ethnic Communities Council.

The provision of community grants was specifically highlighted, primarily as they provide the opportunity for ethnic groups to host cultural events showcasing the positive aspects of their cultural group and minimise the negative opinions that often persist about minority groups.

When asked about what could improve intercultural harmony and increase cultural interaction and understanding in the Darebin community, many different points were made, including:

- specialised competitions in local schools featuring the benefits of cultural diversity,
- additional ESL support and language aids for migrants with poor English skills and an increase in multi-lingual customer service,
- articles in local papers about the value of diversity and interviews with prominent cultural leaders,
- council displays and presentations at major shopping centres,
- incentives for businesses to create diversified employment programs,
- recognition of the additional costs of providing multicultural services,
- more inclusive sports and leisure activities in the community,
- information about cultures being placed in letterboxes,
- more educational programs for youths and seniors in the community,
- a closer consideration of the promotion and delivery of current services to help make them more effective and efficient.

In addition to these, there were several suggestions made that related to the issue of whether or not some minority groups were willing to adapt to the Australian way of life. These suggestions included:

- the need for education programs on the Australian way of life and how to maintain its lifestyle, values and ethics,
- the need for minority groups to understand the Australian way of life and history,



- the need for a ‘further blending of the many cultures’ so that those cultures that prefer to ‘stay within their own group’ will adapt to Australian norms,
- the need for events organised around and focusing on Australian mainstream culture (e.g. ANZAC Day, footy, etc.).

One respondent stated that the best way to promote intercultural harmony and understanding is ‘to send *them* home’. While this attitude was not representative of the majority of people surveyed, it nevertheless highlights the spectrum of views on multiculturalism.

*b. Community views on multicultural policies and programs in Darebin*

Respondents were then presented with a list of services that are already offered by the Darebin City Council and asked which of these should be undertaken in relation to the issue of intercultural harmony and understanding. The responses to this question are presented in the following table.

<b>Activities to promote understanding</b>				
<b>Darebin City Council/Deakin University Community Diversity Survey 2005</b>				
<i>(Percent of total persons)</i>				
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Darebin Number</i>	<i>Darebin Percent</i>	<i>Northcote Percent</i>	<i>Preston Percent</i>
Community/Street festivals	260	86.8%	92.9%	83.5%
Community events	258	86.1%	92.9%	82.3%
Study circles	165	55.0%	73.6%	44.8%
Interfaith meetings	176	58.7%	72.0%	51.4%
Neighbourhood BBQ's	175	58.3%	72.8%	50.3%
Garage sales	107	35.7%	45.4%	30.3%
Information on various ethnic backgrounds	236	78.7%	88.1%	73.5%
Information on various religious practices	219	73.0%	77.9%	70.5%
Other	14	4.7%	5.6%	4.0%

Respondents stated that community/street festivals and community events were the best ways for Council to promote understanding between people of different faiths. Street festivals are held frequently in Darebin and are always popular. It is not surprising, therefore, that they would receive high levels of support.

About half of the respondents believed that interfaith meetings (58.7%) and study circles (55.0%) would be effective. Respondents from the Northcote SLA were significantly more in favour of most activities than those in the Preston SLA, particularly with regard to study circles, interfaith meetings and neighbourhood BBQs.

However, considering that the services mentioned in the survey were already available in Darebin, two pertinent questions remain: firstly, whether or not community respondents were aware of the range of services offered and secondly, if they had attended any of them.

To prompt this question, respondents were presented with a list of the current services offered by the Darebin City Council, as presented in the table over page.

<b>Awareness of Council services for the multicultural community</b>						
Darebin City Council/Deakin University Community Diversity Survey 2005 (Number and percent of total persons)						
Service	Darebin			Northcote	Preston	
	Aware Number	Percent	Not aware Percent	Not stated Percent	Aware Percent	Aware Percent
Council publishes information in languages other than English	266	88.8%	10.4%	0.8%	90.1%	88.1%
Darebin Libraries have books in languages other than English	238	79.4%	18.9%	1.6%	79.3%	79.5%
Council employs bilingual staff	214	71.5%	27.2%	1.3%	69.4%	72.6%
Council organises public events that promote cultural harmony	184	61.3%	37.4%	1.3%	70.8%	56.1%
Council funds ethnic groups, clubs, festivals, associations through Community Grants Scheme	175	58.2%	41.0%	0.8%	62.4%	55.9%
Council displays multi-lingual signs	169	56.4%	43.1%	0.7%	61.4%	53.6%
Council has dedicated telephine line for people who don't speak English to call Council	168	56.0%	42.9%	1.1%	49.3%	59.7%
Council provides information on ethnic groups living in municipality	144	48.0%	51.2%	0.8%	49.3%	47.3%
Seven out of ten Darebin Councillors are from non-English speaking backgrounds	119	39.7%	59.3%	1.0%	40.4%	39.3%
Darebin's 'Meals on Wheels' include many ethnic meals ( <i>Italian, Greek, etc.</i> )	108	36.1%	62.4%	1.5%	30.0%	39.5%
Council's website is in 12 languages other than English	84	28.2%	70.3%	1.5%	26.7%	29.0%

The majority of respondents had a relatively high awareness of at least eight out of the eleven services for the multicultural community. Higher percentages were recorded for services that the respondent and/or their families were likely to access, such as publications in languages other than English and the availability of foreign-language books through Darebin libraries. The importance of these services was further supported in one of the general comments that, in their opinion, ‘language is more of a barrier to interaction than religious differences’.

At the other end of the scale, significantly less people were aware that the Darebin City Council includes Councillors from non-English speaking backgrounds. Only 39.7% realised that this was an intentional strategy of the Council to reflect and represent the diversity found in the City of Darebin. 36.1% were aware that Darebin’s ‘Meals on Wheels’ program caters for different ethnic groups and includes specialised meals (Italian, Greek, Halal etc.).

The lowest rate of awareness was in regard to Darebin City Council’s website being presented in twelve languages other than English. The proportion of respondents aware of Meals on Wheels and Council’s website is also consistent with the proportion of persons who use these services.

In addition to these services, Darebin City Council hosts various activities. To further test whether or not people supported these events, community respondents were asked, out of a list of seven choices, which they had attended.

Responses are outlined in the following table.

<b>Events attended</b>				
<b>Darebin City Council/Deakin University Community Diversity Survey 2005</b>				
<i>(Number and percent of total persons)</i>				
<i>Event</i>	<i>Darebin Number</i>	<i>Darebin Percent</i>	<i>Northcote Percent</i>	<i>Preston Percent</i>
Darebin Festival	171	57.0	57.4	56.9
Darebin Music Feast	105	35.0	48.5	27.7
Kite festival	27	9.0	4.8	11.4
Breakfast seminars	4	1.3	1.9	1.2
Australia Day events	41	13.7	5.1	18.5
Public forums	32	10.7	19.4	5.8
Citizenship ceremonies	39	13.0	9.3	15.2

Of these, the Darebin Festival and Darebin Music Feast were the most widely attended events listed with over half of community respondents reporting that they attended the Darebin Festival (57%) and a further third attending the Darebin Music Feast (35%).

Smaller-scale events, such as the kite festival and breakfast seminars had a lower attendance rate, but were nevertheless supportive of them. As highlighted by one respondent in the general comments section, it was important to run events that encouraged people to come together and learn about one another.

When asked why people had not attended these events, the most frequently cited reasons were that respondents were unaware of the events (48.1%) and that respondents did not have enough time to attend (49.2%). This is in addition to the people that simply have little or no interest in Council activities or events, which is consistent with the proportion of respondents who stated that they were not interested in attending. Only one respondent from the Northcote SLA actually stated that they were uncomfortable mixing with people from different cultural backgrounds.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Contrary to popular perceptions, the data collected from both surveys indicates that multiculturalism is *not* under threat in Australia, or at least not in the Darebin community. The majority of both staff and community respondents not only believed that they had a good understanding of multiculturalism as a concept, but also viewed multicultural policies in positive terms related to giving everyone in Australia ‘a fair go’ regardless of their ethnic or cultural background.

It was also agreed that there is a high level of diversity in Darebin *and* that diversity makes Darebin a better place to live. There was less agreement, however, that the different groups interact well together, or at least that current policies have been effective in promoting an optimum level of harmony in the Darebin Community.

Discrepancies on this point may be explained due to a higher awareness amongst staff of incidents of discrimination.

The high levels of diversity in Darebin are attested to by the fact that the majority of respondents to both surveys indicated that they interacted with friends and family from a diverse range of cultural groups. There was admittedly no difference made between the different ethnic groups and could equally apply to people of Greek and Italian background as to Muslims and people from an Arabic-speaking background.

When asked specifically about their interaction with people from a Muslim background, more interaction was reported by staff than by the community, but more community respondents were likely to have Muslims as friends and family. More staff respondents, by contrast, interacted with Muslims at work.

All groups in Darebin empathise with Muslims who are targeted within the context of the current security environment. Most are moreover supportive of particular rights such as that of a woman to wear *hijab* or a Muslim family to religious expression. There was less obvious support for the prospect of working alongside a Muslim.

Despite a generally positive outlook towards multiculturalism, a small minority continue to hold more negative views. In this respect, community respondents could be divided into three general categories. In Darebin, the majority of respondents (comprising 60% - 75% of the total sample) are characterised by very tolerant attitudes and strong support of diversity. These respondents view diversity as positive and beneficial to Australia. They are supportive of multiculturalism and strongly support the right of Muslims to live in Australia and practice their religion freely. Respondents from this group are also likely to have greater confidence in diversity within Darebin. Respondents from this group are more likely to be from the Northcote SLA and from an English-speaking background.

A second group of respondents (comprising 15% - 25% of the total sample) are comfortable with some aspects of diversity. These respondents are reasonably supportive of Muslims and multiculturalism but are either unsure of or uncomfortable with some aspects. While they are supportive of the rights and freedoms of Muslims they would not necessarily feel comfortable going into business with a Muslim and are uncomfortable with some aspects of Muslim practice. These respondents are not necessarily racist; however they hold less tolerant views and may have less confidence in social harmony in Darebin generally. Such respondents may be either NESB or ESB and may come from either SLA of Darebin.

There is then a third group of respondents (comprising 5% - 15% of the total sample) that, as a whole, is not comfortable with diversity, multiculturalism or Muslims and generally hold highly intolerant views; they would probably not be prepared to hire a woman who wore *hijab*, would not live next door to a Muslim or visit a Muslim household. They do not empathise with Muslims and are not convinced they respect Australian laws or are committed to peace. Approximately 3% - 5% of respondents could be considered by some to be 'hardcore racists'. These respondents do not support the rights of Muslims to freedom of religion or freedom of dress. Furthermore, they believe all Muslims should be held accountable for extremist Islamic terrorism and that Muslims want to convert Australia into an Islamic country.

Both Staff and Community respondents believed that the Darebin City Council should and can play an important role in addressing issues related to intercultural harmony and understanding. There is a high level of support from both groups for the

diversification of centralised services, but there is less agreement on exactly what this means in practice. Community respondents have a higher level of agreement across *all categories* when considering which activities should be funded by government. The largest discrepancy between staff and community views on government funding related to funding for 'Saturday ethnic schools'.

Support for council notwithstanding, there are significant numbers of Darebin residents who are either unaware of the different services and events offered by Council or uninterested in participating in Council business. This presents a challenge for Council in terms of publicising their activities and maintaining a high level of community engagement.

Overall, it should be pointed out that while the community survey was a representative sample, the staff survey was not. The results should therefore be viewed with caution and not treated as generalisable.



## **Chapter 6: Qualitative Interviews in Darebin**

Twenty-two qualitative interviews were conducted in the Darebin area over a three month period from October to December 2005. These interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face. They had durations ranging from 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the response of the interviewee.

Interviewees included Council employees and community leaders, including religious leaders and spokespersons of relevant NGOs in Darebin. In addition, local business owners and general community members were interviewed.

The primary objective of the qualitative interview was to gain a better understanding of prevailing social attitudes that facilitate or reduce social exclusion and racially motivated discrimination, and the potential for informed policy responses at the local government level.

A second objective was to further test the overarching results of the Darebin council staff and community surveys and gain insight into why people responded in the ways that they did.

Three general topics were addressed (multiculturalism and cultural diversity, perceptions of Muslims and the role of local government in promoting intercultural harmony). These topics were designed to correspond with the structure of the staff and community surveys. Other than introducing topics and asking very general introductory questions, the interviews were largely unstructured in order to allow interviewees the opportunity to elaborate on whatever issues concerned them most.

### **6.1 Views On Multiculturalism**

The overarching sentiment of these interviews was that multiculturalism remains viable in the context of current social trends. Most people agreed that Australia has a diverse population. They also agreed that multicultural policies and programs were both necessary and important. However, these views do not imply that everyone was comfortable with the concept of multiculturalism or clear about its meaning. A local businessman in Preston, for example, was evasive about his views on multiculturalism, arguing that he 'didn't care about it much'. He nevertheless felt that multicultural policies provided the best path available at the present time.

This response highlights that multiculturalism can mean very different things to different people. It also highlights that a single person may hold a range of contradictory or paradoxical views about multiculturalism. This ambiguity creates challenges for policy-makers. As the following discussion reveals, most interviewees do not challenge the basic idea of multiculturalism but do question various elements of the current policy structure. Ambiguous meanings attached to multiculturalism thus raise questions as to the terms in which to promote sustainable and inclusive policies that attract people to common ideals.

### **6.1.1 Approaches to multiculturalism**

A number of interviewees are staunch advocates of multiculturalism and have spent their lives and careers trying to promote these values in the community. A member of the local clergy elaborated on his views of multiculturalism, as well as his efforts over the last 45 years to promote intercultural harmony. For him, multiculturalism, unlike assimilation, allows people to retain the positive aspects of their society and thereby enrich Australia's diverse population through their cultural customs and practices:

*'Multiculturalism should be like a marriage where people with two completely different personalities [and] two completely different backgrounds...come together and create a new unit. They're still two individuals. They still have [their individual] backgrounds [and] ...preferences, but they learn to live together and respect each other'.*

But to do this, the different cultural groups must share with each other what they have in common and thereby 'build a common future' that both includes the previous 'marks of individuality' between the different cultures but promotes those things that they both have in common. For this interviewee, multiculturalism was not just a policy goal but a 'very rich aspect of Australian life' that should be embraced and fully appreciated. It was a long-term project that required constant attention to be sustained.

A similar approach was taken by a Muslim interviewee. He encourages Muslims in Australia to shed certain damaging aspects of their purely *ethnic based identity* and form an Islamic identity that is compatible with Australian society. From his perspective, the reality of adapting to Australian culture is not a *choice* but 'more an issue of survival'. But just because he advocates moving beyond strict nationalistic attachments that are not conducive to participating in Australian society, this does not extend to abandoning the Islamic faith. The question for him is instead how to create 'an Australian identity [fused] with Islamic religious practice'. In this context, multiculturalism does indeed allow an individual to retain the important aspects of their identity and religion, but in the context of Australian ideals.

He went on to say that 'In fact, I believe that the multiculturalism idea applies more to the Islamic community than to ethnic-specific or religious communities because what we've done is ...promote Islam under the heading of Australian ...Muslims. In his opinion, second and third generation Muslim youth were not 'going to say...I'm a Turk or an Arab or whatever, they're going to say that they are an Australian Muslim'.

A parish priest approaches multiculturalism and cultural diversity as a two-way street that requires ongoing communication and care to sustain. The emphasis for him is on generating respect for both the newer established migrant groups in the community *as well as* for the mainstream Australian culture. The focus is upon the promotion of genuine communication between different groups of people in order to foster intercultural understanding. He noted, however, that it is difficult to encourage migrants to integrate into a society that is unsure of what its core values are. One way that he suggests to accommodate this approach is to publish information in local papers in the various languages of the community, but to publish articles that illustrate positive aspects of Australian history or communicate information about upcoming national events such as the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

A visiting migrant priest in Preston added to this, arguing that exposure to and mixing with the wider community can only enrich a person's understanding of the world.



Multiculturalism should therefore be viewed *not* as a policy leading to a loss of one's identity, but rather 'an *opportunity* to expand new horizons and enrich one's life'.

Drawing on this notion of multiculturalism as an opportunity for enrichment both for minorities and majorities, the manager of a local RSL in Darebin provided a pertinent example. He noted that while Greek Easter celebrations and Chinese New Year celebrations had once been viewed with suspicion by the mainstream Australian population, they were now accepted as a vibrant aspect of Australian life.

A principal in a local secondary school also supported the view that multiculturalism had benefits for the community as a whole. She explained that although her school was a religious one, any student regardless of their ethnic and/or religious background was eligible to attend classes. The philosophy behind the school's policy is to promote what students have in common and not what divides them. When asked if this policy had been beneficial to the school, she responded that while there had been individuals and families that felt uncomfortable with certain aspects of this policy, many more had made a conscious decision to send their children to the school for their full education. There had even been cases where people had moved out of the Darebin community, but still took steps for their children to stay at the school.

This principle went on to express a complex personal response to the acceptance of diverse cultural practices. The school was awarded funding to engage in a harmony project with a local Muslim school where 'boys only' and 'girls only' days are organised to bring students from the two schools together to participate in educational activities that are of benefit to both groups. However, the principal was not fully convinced that this was an optimal program. While she fully supports a woman's right to wear *hijab* and the right of Muslim families to enjoy freedom of religious expression, she is also concerned that many religions put too many restrictions on young girls. In addition, she sees value in having an integrated classroom in terms of different cultural groups and equality of the sexes. Even with this perspective, she does not feel that she has a right to impose her ideas on other groups of people anymore than she has to accept everything that she hears from different groups. The principle of 'agreeing to disagree' again seems an appropriate description for this approach to intercultural understanding and harmony.

### **6.1.2 Doubts and criticisms of Multiculturalism:**

A number of interviewees expressed the opinion that multicultural policies favoured religious and cultural minorities over the mainstream population. They perceived that this kind of favouritism was becoming increasingly common.

A local businessman and resident of Preston made the point that, in his opinion, the banning of public nativity scenes was a 'classic example' of a situation where the needs and concerns of particular minority groups were pandered to while the concerns of the mainstream society were just ignored, or were at least dismissed. On this point, he was not alone. Several people mentioned their lack of understanding for why Christmas parties and the singing of Christmas carols had been banned in the schools.

Similar observations were made about funding levels for multicultural programs. One local businessman, for example, strongly argued that there are times when multiculturalism is used as a label to hide other political agendas and that funds that are collected 'from the whole city' are routinely used to the benefit of selected

culturally-specific parts of the community. When taken to its logical conclusion, this line of reasoning has, in the past, fostered a perception that multicultural policies are financially costly to the community and that the people to whom these funds are directed are a burden on society.

A social worker in the community also raised this point when discussing staff attitudes to welfare provision to the diverse ethnic minority groups in Darebin. In her experience, resentment was usually directed towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the community. Even if not considered burdens, she argued, there is a potential for people to see these groups as ‘getting something extra to everyone else.’ This potential is compounded when the same people are perceived to be accessing mainstream as well as culturally specific services.

Similar observations were made by a principal of a local school in Darebin. She maintained that because people lack knowledge about what is happening in Indigenous communities, they see the outflow of government resources (e.g. building houses, giving money, etc.) as a program that provides extra benefits to these communities that they did not necessarily earn.

A Council employee noted their observations of this issue in relation to council policies:

*‘I’ve heard it said from regular customers, and I must admit from some business people...that we’re to be careful that we do not discriminate against the ethno-Aussie, [the] Aussie Anglo. ...Rightly or wrongly, some people are thinking along the lines that there’s a lot of resources being targeted to ... [particular communities] that could’ve been or should’ve been targeted equally to the Dinky Die Aussie’.*

One perspective raised in several interviews was that hostility to multiculturalism was related in some cases to a tension between more established and newer migrant groups. An academic described the tone of this debate. She held that the problem stems from the fact that migrant groups that arrived in Australia immediately following the end of World War II were simply expected to assimilate into Australian society. So, when they see the current approach to integration, many come to interpret multiculturalism as a policy that allows migrants to assume all the rights of living in Australia without shouldering the associated responsibilities. This, in turn, can translate into negative opinions about multiculturalism. Many interviews touched on this issue, alluding to the ‘different patterns of assimilation between older and newer migrant groups’, or to the resulting situation where the two groups are unlikely to interact socially.

One interviewee provided a good example of the ‘older’ migrant approach, as outlined by the academic interviewee. ‘Robert’ is a businessman in the community who also participates in a local non-government organisation. He is a second generation Australian from a post-WWII European migrant family.

For Robert, multiculturalism was to be completely rejected as the worst thing to have ever happened to Australia, as disintegrative and a threat to social cohesion. According to Robert, multiculturalism, despite its original ideals, has fostered a type of mentality that has divided the community ‘along cultural and ethnic lines’ when it should have been working towards a sustainable level of social cohesion. He went so far as to argue that multiculturalism had instead created a general atmosphere of

distrust, even hatred in the community and as a result had added ‘absolutely nothing to further the Australian way of life’.

For Robert, assimilation is the key to social cohesion in Australian society. Since ‘the strength of a country [is] in the national pride of the people’, there are problems when people are unwilling to commit themselves to being Australian first and placing their ethnic identity second. While migrants should ‘cherish [their] roots’ and the countries from which their forefathers came, their ultimate goal should be to become Australian and adopt the customs of the mainstream culture. He extends this requirement to include people that were born in Australia, who still insist on putting their ethnic before their Australian identity. He holds that if a person decides to adopt a new country, ‘for whatever reason’, then they should make every effort to ‘become part of that country’ and integrate into the mainstream society.

A number of interviewees spoke positively of assimilation in this respect. They argued that because migrant ‘groups that came before the current groups...kept their own culture within their own groups but...assimilated into the groups surrounding them’, social cohesion had developed naturally over time. This sentiment was voiced in several interviews, with one respondent arguing that while she believes that cultural minority groups should be able to retain various aspects of their familial cultural heritage, she nevertheless feels that they ‘need to learn to be loyal to Australia’.

Another theme was that migrants should take more responsibility upon themselves for their current situation. For many established migrant groups, this was the only course of action that they understood or knew. Because of this, many established migrant groups appear uneasy with what they see as unwillingness on the part of newer migrant groups to do what they need to do to integrate into society. Going back to Robert, since the preceding groups of migrants ‘had to make their own way in society and become fellow citizens’, why should the newer groups be any different. Rather than creating new services that will cost the Australian taxpayer more money, newer migrants should promote their own interests and become an active part of society without having to be pushed by someone on the outside.

Others took a different view of the integration versus assimilation question. As posited by a member of the local clergy, it only makes sense that newly arrived migrants will tend to seek out communities that understand their unique cultural and financial needs. Then, with time and language training, these migrants will ‘work their way out’ of these communities and integrate more fully into mainstream society.

A number of interviewees expressed concerns about the success of multiculturalism, whilst they may not necessarily have been opposed to it in principle. ‘Bart,’ the manager of a local reception centre related an experience whilst running multiethnic wedding receptions. One night, a very nationalistic group of Serbians held their reception at Bart’s venue. The Serbian wedding party played the Serbian national anthem during speeches and engaged in various nationalistic customs that had been forbidden in the reception contract. When Bart was confronted with these actions, he admits to feeling incredibly uncomfortable. He remembers feeling at that moment that, in his opinion, multiculturalism had just not been successful.

A similar sentiment was expressed by a local social worker, who maintained that while she could understand why people would want to live in communities with other people from their own ethnic background, or why migrants groups often take money from the Australian government only to send it back to their homelands, she could see

how this practice would foster misunderstandings and a sense of uneasiness in the wider community.

### **6.1.3 Obstacles to multiculturalism**

For many, the problem was not with what multiculturalism is meant to achieve in Australia, but with what the concept now symbolises. While the initial concepts and ideals were positive and beneficial to society, there is a widespread perception that multiculturalism had now become something that it was not intended to be in the beginning. One interviewee described this situation in the following terms:

*'I think multiculturalism was a bit of a straw man to begin with in some senses. I think it was a political strategy with some genuine strategies associated with it and some very real outcomes, but I think that was a very long time ago'.*

'Irena,' a worker at a local Living and Learning Centre, takes a similar approach and compares multiculturalism to other 'isms (with feminism for example). While many of the basic tenets of multiculturalism have been successful, there are still holes to be filled to ensure that more than just superficial change is enacted.

In her opinion, there may have been successes tied to the fact that people now know multiculturalism *the word*, but this does not mean that genuine change and equality have followed. Irena identifies three problematic aspects of multiculturalism that must be addressed on an ongoing basis:

- The continual lack of resources and/or funding
- The inherent lack of longer-term planning
- The persistent lack of knowledge and understanding in the community

As these points were also raised in many of the other interviews, Irena's categories will each be considered and discussed.

Resources were discussed in many interviews. With specific reference to multiculturalism, the most common complaints raised related to the increased funding needed to publish pamphlets, letters and booklets etc. in a variety of languages. Consider, for example, what were once small pamphlets produced by libraries to outline the current fines structure for overdue books and media materials. When printed to include the top languages in the community, however, the size can potentially double or even triple, thereby affecting the cost.

In addition, there are also unintentional consequences of current types of funding for multicultural events. For example, when the VMC give community grants, they are primarily for small dancing groups from a particular ethnic community, or for senior citizens groups, again from a particular ethnic group. The problem with this is that under these schemes, the disparate groups remain insular. For the staff at the Living and Learning Centre, the question to be considered in the future is why these activities are not extended to include grants that are set aside and only given to groups that include cross-cultural participation in activities.

There are also problems with longer-term planning. At the Living and Learning Centre, for example, while there are multiple (very popular) language classes offered, and there is support for beginning language classes, there is little funding for higher-level classes. The reasoning behind this approach is that people will ideally advance such that they can make it on their own. They are, in these instances, expected to

move to TAFE classes, but because of the lack of funding even here, many of these individuals drop out. She also highlights that the over 55s programs are in danger of losing funding, even when they are important to allow grandparents to better understand their grandchildren, which in turn will help the grandchildren adapt to Australian society.

There are other reasons why multiculturalism is problematic, with the second group associated with the term itself and current perceptions thereof. At the Living and Learning Centre mentioned above, whenever multicultural events are advertised in the community, the administrators always receive phone calls from people who want to know if they, as Australians, are welcome to come to the event. According to this, there is a basis to conclude that multiculturalism is viewed by much of the mainstream public as a policy for migrants only. The concerns expressed about library services were similar in that they reflect a concern that by using the word multicultural, the published programs would not appear to be open to the entire community.

In part because of this perception, many of those interviewed actively avoided using 'multicultural' as a term, but were unsure of what to replace it with. For example, one of the local librarians was insistent that she 'was uncomfortable advertising multicultural events' because she is always afraid that people in the community might see this as pandering to minority groups at the expense of the mainstream community. In an attempt to appear more inclusive, she preferred to promote her events as 'inclusive of multicultural elements'. She was not alone. Most of the people interviewed preferred to discuss these issues in relation to cultural diversity and intercultural harmony, not multiculturalism.

A Muslim interviewee also expressed concern over the effectiveness of the concept of multiculturalism. To him, multicultural policies are somewhat limiting, not because they are unable to address the needs of different cultural groups, but because they fail to distinguish between religious and cultural orientations. In this, he calls for clearer distinctions to be made between Islam, the religion, and the highly varied cultural groups to which any particular Muslim might belong, ranging from those associated with deeply conservative (in religion and culture) countries to liberal western countries. He does not, it is important to note, call for the eradication of multiculturalism.

## ***6.2 Perceptions and Experiences of Muslims in Darebin***

### **6.2.1 The post 9/11 context**

In the current (security-dominated) political environment, the Islamic other has entered popular consciousness in many western societies. In response to an increasing awareness of international events since the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, many questions have emerged as to whether or not Muslim groups in general pose a threat to existing levels of social cohesion found in the West. Related to this is a further question about where Muslim loyalties lie (e.g. to their adopted country or to Islam alone) and if Islam is compatible with democratic ideals. This presents a serious challenge for Muslim migrant groups in Western societies, as their place and influence in society has become increasingly questioned.

Ironically, every Muslim interviewed made the comment that prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>, they had considered Australia to be a leading example of the success of multicultural development. They were moreover comfortable living in Australia as Muslims, with most highlighting the importance of Australia's commitment to freedom of religious expression. As explained by 'Akbar,' a Muslim architect and planner, Australia was an environment where Muslims were free to debate and interpret Islam as was appropriate to them and to their families. It was not a place where the state dictated what was and was not a suitable interpretation of Islamic edicts. For Akbar, this is the type of reasoning most often lost on people that wonder why Muslim groups and families would choose to migrate to Australia rather than to a predominantly Muslim country in the Middle East or Asia. The freedom to practice religion in this way that is available in Australia means that, in his opinion, 'Australia presents as more of an Islamic country than any other country' in the world.

In the current political environment, by contrast, every Muslim interviewee explained that they had each questioned not only the success of Australia's multiculturalism but also its commitment to religious freedom. They referred to a situation whereby Muslims see themselves as having been singled out and targeted by the Australian government and the mainstream society. For many, this can be attributed to the current security dominated political environment and its inclination to appeal to the worst in people rather than promoting what is best.

One interviewee outlined the difficulties of living in Australia as a Muslim in the current political atmosphere:

'My heater at home was playing up [and] the pilot was making a ticking sound. ... Within about two hours, I had my neighbours coming and knocking on the door, and one of them actually said to me, what have you got in your backyard that's ticking? ... I actually had to take him into the back for him to actually understand and realise that I wasn't lying [about the pilot light].'

While she understands that people are concerned about their security, she feels it is unacceptable for them to assume that she threatens them in this context. The same woman also related the following story:

*'I had a guy try to strangle me [in the city] and he threw me through a window of a milkbar ... after September 11<sup>th</sup>. ... There was no reaction. The police didn't even come out when I called them. They asked if I could identify the man. I said, well, I guess if I saw him, but he's obviously not here because I'm still alive. And he said, well, you know, ma'am, I don't know what I can do for you then.'*

She also encountered problems at her workplace. While she works as a teacher in a school that supports her in her choice to wear a headscarf, she nevertheless encountered various social barriers when she first started teaching there.

Until the students came to know her, some of them would cross to the other side of the hall to avoid contact with her because of her headscarf. In addition, despite the multicultural emphasis of the education at this school, the children and their parents would still make racist comments to her. At one of the parent-teacher conferences, for example, she was confronted with a parent who wanted to know: 'how's a school OK with a bomber teaching the children'? Despite these incidents, she maintained that she had made a decision to work in Darebin because she believed it had a better atmosphere than where she actually lived.

Given this context, a number of Muslim interviewees expressed doubts about the extent to which a commitment to multiculturalism actually existed in Australia. One person asserted the following:

*'I'm sorry, but if Australia's supposed to [still] be multicultural, then ...we call ourselves multicultural but we don't act on it at all as a country'.*

Another suggested:

*'Multiculturalism in general is probably not practiced to the point where we make it out to be. A lot of people ...are not really multicultural. They say it, but I believe there remains prejudice and nationalism involved.'*

A third mentioned that the current atmosphere was depressing to him.

Another makes the following point:

*And I just have to ask myself how we actually are a multicultural country, when everyone around me has sort of said this [or that] has happened to me'.*

## **6.2.2 Perceptions of Muslims and Islam**

A number of misconceptions and stereotypes about Muslims and Islam arose during interviews. One such misconception revolved around the use of the word *jihad*. For most Muslims, this word denotes a daily struggle against sin and it can be against more encompassing issues such as poverty, or more personal issues.

A local clergy, after expressing his sadness that a situation had emerged where peaceful Muslim groups were not clearly distinguished from extremists, continued by repeating stereotypes about the Koran. In his opinion, rather than 'love, grace and forgiveness', the Koran includes 'really hard, confrontational stuff that sets the Muslims against each other' and against the West. The clergyman nevertheless freely admitted that he does not understand all aspects of the Koran and was willing to have someone explain it to him. He called for a mutual dialogue that could dispel misconceptions on both sides of the debate.

Robert held that:

*'The majority of Muslims will never assimilate into Australian culture. They don't want to [and] their religion probably forbids it'.*

One interviewee mentioned that whenever a higher concentration of Muslims moved into a particular community, the property prices of the area would lower.

Council librarians explained that they are sometimes confronted with complaints that they should not provide Arabic books in their collection because it might incite religious hatred in the community. It is significant that Arabic was singled out as a potential danger while other foreign language collections were not.

One interviewee related her views on Muslims in the following way. She said that she had worked in charity organisations on cases where Muslim families had been paid money from Centrelink or the government and the man considered the money to be his alone and only gave his wife little or no money to take care of the children.

### **6.2.2.1 Perceptions of Muslim women:**

When discussing perceptions of Muslims and Islam in Western society, the issue of Muslim women choosing to wear *hijab* is often brought up early in the conversation. The reason for this is clear, because these women are more visible, they are noticed more often by the people in the community. There are two general assumptions that

are encountered with this issue. One stream is similar to the debate above where some people perceive a woman's choice to wear traditional Muslim clothing as challenging to Western society and a sign that they are unwilling to integrate. As stated by one respondent, 'When I see a woman wearing the robes, I just can't help ... [but] think that they are different or something'.

The second stream reflects trouble accepting that the decision to wear *hijab* is really a choice. This is particularly true of female respondents who argue that while they uphold a woman's choice to wear whatever she likes, this particular example was often confronting and/or off-putting to them.

A number of the women interviewed (both Muslim and non-Muslim) made a comparison between public perceptions of why a Catholic nun would choose to become a nun in the first place, but more importantly to wear a habit in public, and the choice of a Muslim woman to wear *hijab*. One of the Muslim women interviewed picks up on this debate and asks why it is that when women decide to become nuns they are appreciated and celebrated for their devotion to God, but when a Muslim woman wears the traditional Muslim dress they are viewed with suspicion and fear. She went so far as to say that, in her opinion, they were viewed 'as disgusting' to certain segments in society, especially when, in her opinion, women wear headscarves so that they will be valued for who they are and not for how they look.

The perception that Muslim women are repressed under Islam is fairly entrenched in the minds of some respondents. This is especially the case for women who feel that they have witnessed behaviour to substantiate their concerns. One of the women interviewed, for example, gave the example of a Muslim man that she knew who had a Muslim wife overseas, as well as a non-Muslim girlfriend here in Australia. For her, this reinforced the idea that Western women are viewed by Muslim men as playthings to be used when convenient and then thrown away.

For others there are clear value distinctions between different practices associated with Islam. A female academic, outlined this dilemma perfectly, arguing that while she upholds the right of Muslim women to wear what they choose and does not understand why this is such a big issue, there are traditional practices that she could never accept, such as honour killing or female circumcision. She is quick to point out, however, that she would not necessarily associate these practices with Muslims in general or with migrant groups in Australia, especially as most migrants would also not approve of these more extreme practices against women. In her opinion, clear distinctions must be made in people's minds between practices that are the choice of the woman and those that violate a woman's basic human rights. That most Muslims also dismiss these as extreme practices from a more archaic period highlights that Muslim groups do make such distinctions. The problem is that not everyone from the mainstream community is given the information to become aware of these distinctions and differentiate between groups.

Some interviewees suggested that they need to know more about Islam in order to come to a balanced understanding of the cultural and religious practices of Muslim groups in the community.



### **6.2.3 How Muslims in Darebin are working for intercultural understanding**

One perception identified in interviews was that Muslim groups will not engage in debate. Some respondents could not understand why Australian Muslims often appear unwilling to condemn terrorism, honour killing or crimes committed by Muslims in the community openly. Some even take this as implied support for the terrorist cause. Such views tap into a broader perception that Muslims are either unwilling or unable to integrate into society, or alternatively that Islam and democracy are incompatible. In response to this perception, one of the Muslims interviewed provided four potential explanations for why Muslim groups have not made a clear response:

- Some Muslims are worried about their English skills and are concerned that if they do make statements, their words will be manipulated to mean something they did not say.
- Other Muslims believe that because of the negative media representations of Islam, even if they did speak out, they would not be heard.
- Another group believes that there is a war being waged against them and are discouraged from taking any action because only a minority of people would actually hear them. They feel that everyone on the street hates them and would not be interested in hearing what they have to say,
- Then there are other individual Muslims who are motivated to promote a more positive image of Islam.

One interviewee is active in combating negative perceptions of Muslims in all areas of his life. When he first moved into the community, for example, he did a letterbox drop to introduce his family to the neighbourhood in the hope that this would provide a positive impression of what it means to have a Muslim family as a neighbour.

Akbar is also a counsellor for a Muslim youth organisation that he used to attend in his youth. The group has worked to remain inclusive and caters to Muslim youth from any nationality and encouraged participation from youth ranging from children as young as five to students at the tertiary level. In this organisation, counsellors have the following objectives:

- To help Muslim youth develop an identity that still retains their Muslim beliefs but adapts to life in Australia.
- To address problems of identity where Muslim youth are still trying to ‘identify with a mythical mother country that they had never visited and couldn’t relate to’.
- To explore ways in which Australian citizenship can be coupled with an Islamic religious identity, or alternatively ‘to promote an Islamic identity within an Australian context’.
- To give training to the different groups of young people and teach them how to talk to others about Islam, or how to respond to potentially difficult questions about Islam in the school yard or in the neighbourhood.

Akbar moreover extends this type of thinking to his work as an architect and community planner. In his business, he makes it a point to encourage local businesses and educational facilities to create longer-term, more holistic approaches to creating what he terms a ‘Muslim friendly atmosphere’ in these different sectors of the

community. Rather than advising clients to use temporary solutions, such as simply building another Mosque to accommodate more people, he finds ways to change the general atmosphere of an area such that the different groups are able to coexist peacefully.

In this discussion, Akbar highlights something that often perplexes him. With all his efforts to encourage Muslims to adapt to the Australian culture while retaining their religious orientation, he demonstrates how this is difficult because it is often unclear what practices are (and are not) part of Australian culture. From his perspective, Australian values include 'having a fair go, treating everyone equally and not blaming some people for the actions of other', all of which he upholds. He also highlights that he is a 'passionate football player' and enjoys BBQs on the weekends. And while he is confident that he, as a Muslim, upholds these distinctively Australian values and customs, it often appears that in practice the standard keeps shifting and that the mainstream Australian population is unable to define what makes someone Australian or un-Australian.

'Zakara,' another Muslim respondent, also volunteers in the Darebin and surrounding area to promote a more positive image for Muslims in the community. Sharing similarities with Akbar, Zakara teaches in a community ethnic-based Sunday school where she instructs young Muslim children how to react when they are teased at school because of their religion. In this, both Akbar and Zakara are preparing the children to share their ideas with others so that higher levels of mutual understanding can be developed between different groups.

## **6.3 Strategies To Promote Intercultural Understanding And Harmony**

### **6.3.1 The need for mutual dialogue**

When asked about how to overcome intercultural tensions and promote understanding, the overall response was that different groups needed to interact with each other. This, in turn, would foster more substantial levels of intercultural harmony and understanding in the Darebin community. As highlighted in one interview, 'every community has their story, so get them to tell it to the other people to help [them] understand'. This refers back to the perception that multiculturalism and cultural diversity enrich the community through exposure to different cultures and increasing levels of comfort with difference.

Some assert that it is the responsibility of the mainstream to learn about minority cultures 'in the same way that they [migrants] are forced to learn more about what it is to be in Australia and to be Australian'. According to others, it is the responsibility of the migrant families to integrate into society. A compromise is envisioned by many through two-way communication where both the mainstream population *and* the minority groups in the community remain open to interacting and communicating with all other groups in the community.

In general there was a 'common sense' recognition that increased levels of exposure and interaction between different groups would break down fears and cultural

barriers, since individuals would encounter each other as everyday people rather than as cultural stereotypes. The following statements are representative in this respect:

*'Once you get to know people, the first thing you realise is that you don't take notice of the colour of the skin. That's sort of lost to you. You really take them on what you need as people and their needs are usually rather similar to your own'.*

The second was specific to Muslim groups in the community, but the sentiment could be applied to any minority group:

*'If you know someone who's a Muslim and you're good friends with them, you're not going to believe everything that you hear about Muslims, are you'?*

That this type of approach is effective was illustrated in one interview where a local social worker confided that while there are times when it seemed to her that multiculturalism has had more failures than successes, she would come into contact with a migrant Australian and after spending time with them would conclude that they are 'some of the most marvellous Australians that she had had the opportunity to meet.

Other practical examples were provided. Zakara believed that through interaction and through her holistic approach to teaching where she presents information about all different religions and cultural practices, she feels that she has changed many formerly entrenched negative stereotypes about Muslims. As her students began to relax around her, they began to ask more questions, which have fostered a mutual understanding and acceptance between them. The children have come to accept her to the point that they now often ask specifically for her to be their chaperone on school outings. In her opinion, racism is overcome through contact and knowledge.

Different approaches have been adopted to try and bring about this level of mutual understanding. The local Catholic priest interjects aspects of Australian culture and history into his sermons and everyday conversations in an attempt to introduce migrants to aspects of life that are uniquely Australian. His intention is for newly arrived families to obtain a positive attitude to learning more about their new environment and thereby feel more comfortable about actively participating in the community. It has already been highlighted that many teachers approach this dilemma by changing their curriculum to include information about all different cultures and ethnic groupings that have contributed to the history of Australia.

The key to this approach is a commitment to the principle that multiculturalism should be more than the uni-directional dictation of ideas from the mainstream community to the minorities in the area. It must be interactive between all groups in the community. One of the Muslim respondents captured this objective in the following way:

*'It's [important] to understand one another. ...I listen to where you're from, and you listen to where I'm from and what I'm about, what you're about, your beliefs and values and my beliefs and values. Understanding is the first key'.*

In his opinion, a discussion of religion was to be separate from this, but nevertheless related. All he wanted was the opportunity to discuss Islam and why it is important to him.

Another common response was to employ strategies and programs that emphasise that the 'different' groups in Darebin are essentially the same, even if they approach life from slightly different perspectives because of their family background and life experiences.

In addition to this general call for interaction and education, there was also recognition that migrants had specific health requirements and calls to address these needs. Some respondents noted that social exclusion often leads to serious health problems. This can take two forms. The first has to do with a lack of communication about the Australian health sector. Without plain language statements and information that address the basic concerns and misconceptions of migrants for Western medical practices, many people in these groups simply neglect their needs and thereby allow their health to deteriorate to alarming levels. In addition, many in the Australian health sector are unaware of migrant perceptions of health care and attempt to approach them in the same way that they do mainstream Australians. When approaching migrant patients, medical staff and/or social workers must understand that for some migrants, 'there is no framework for them of going to a doctor or a nurse or a hospital or a medical centre or even having diagnostic tests or [going to a chemist] and so forth'.

### **6.3.2 A Perceived Role for the Darebin Council**

The final topic is related to the optimum role of the local City Council in dealing with issues of intercultural harmony. There was widespread support for the current trend whereby the local City Councils assumed more responsibility for such issues. Several interviews reinforced this conclusion through the argument that the local level must be emphasised when dealing with intercultural harmony and understanding because the local community was where people meet and have the opportunity to interact on a daily basis.

It was also highlighted that the grassroots level is particularly important and should be the starting point of any community endeavour. The argument presented in one interview was that, in his opinion, it is 'difficult to start at the top', if the objective is to reach out to everyone in an equitable manner.

A similar sentiment was also expressed by one Muslim respondent who shared an Islamic injunction that people are to respect and respond to their neighbours 'almost as a person who would have inheritance rights of you'. He moreover demonstrated the scope involved when he further explained that the Islamic definition of a neighbour is 'a person who lives up to forty houses that way, forty houses the other way, forty houses all around', which in fact encompasses the entire local community.

Another perspective was provided by a local businessman who was less than enthusiastic for any increase in multicultural policies but nevertheless thought that it would be counterproductive to have 'one overriding policy' at the state or federal levels that was not cognisant of the different needs and concerns of the different communities and their unique cultural mix. The conclusion he draws is that, in his opinion, it would be a problem 'if some migrants were left out in the cold simply because they are in a municipality' that is either unwilling or unable to cater for their needs.

Two solutions to this dilemma came up during interviews. The first was that the state and territory governments could act as a watch-dog to ensure that all Councils in that particular state or territory continued to work towards the same goals and objectives, even if they employed different ways and means to achieve them. An alternative to

this was that peak bodies like the Victorian Multicultural Committee (VMC) could act as a regulating agency to ensure that all ministries and multicultural officers were doing what they were either elected or appointed to do.

This demonstrates that the high levels of support for local city councils to deal with intercultural tension and discrimination is not without concerns and/or suspicions, in particular as to why the shift of responsibility happened in the first place. The clear message: while the grassroots level is closest to the people and thereby more in tune with the needs and concerns of the community, this should not be used as an excuse for the state and federal levels of government to withdraw their funding and/or support. Each level of government should have its own responsibilities that come together to achieve the same goals.

In this respect a member of the Darebin library staff referred to the cost of multicultural policies being borne by local government (printing small booklets in the different languages of the community, for example). For another interviewee, there is a danger that people might not respond as urgently to local policies as they would to those that originate at the state or federal levels of government.

Whatever reservations were expressed in interviews about multiculturalism and the optimum role for local government, there were no such reservations about the Darebin City Council specifically. It was, by contrast, described as proactive in its efforts to address community concerns before they became social problems. It was moreover suggested that Darebin City Council be held up as a benchmark for other local city councils to follow. Darebin City Council was described as inclusive and consultative. As highlighted in one interview, 'there's real policy [in Darebin], a strong policy that in everything they do, they actually consult with all the various different ethnic groups' in the community.'

Through these efforts, Darebin City Council not only appeals to the mainstream society, but was endorsed by all Muslim respondents as well. In particular, interviewees spoke highly of the appointment of Ms. Dalal Smiley as Darebin's Multicultural Officer, community development schemes like the Cramer Street Project where local residents were introduced to the Cramer Street Mosque, and the creation of DECC which acts as consultative body representing the various ethnic groups and associations in the Darebin community. Of primary importance, however, is the realisation that the Council's promotion of a particular event in the Muslim community legitimates it in the eyes of the mainstream population. Because of this, there is more chance that a wider group of people will attend an event that they might otherwise have been afraid of.

A clear plan of what needed to be done by council in order to promote intercultural harmony was articulated in one interview and included the following points:

- Cross-cultural interaction should be explicitly supported in all government policies and programs.
- Advisory boards should be reviewed to ensure that the people in influential positions are doing their jobs; that if they aren't, they should do something else.
- More community engagement should be encouraged with community leaders and clergy.
- Longer-term strategies should be more aggressively pursued and implemented so that problems are not only addressed after they have emerged.

- Policies should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they remain current and are able to address the changing needs of the community.
- More safeguards should be put in place to ensure that the policies are indeed achieving what they were originally formulated to do.
- At the community level, learning circles should be created where issues could be discussed at regularly scheduled meetings.

From this person's perspective, changes to multiculturalism are achievable and even affordable, but they require more coordination and thought than other programs and must include increased attention to these key issues.

This same enthusiasm for Darebin's multicultural policies and programs was also found when interviewing Council employees. While it should be reiterated that this is not a representative sample, and that the interview schedule included only the people who responded to the invitation, several different sectors were represented. In addition to this, the discussions during interviews with Council employees were indicative of the results of the internal staff survey. Thus implied is that the approach to multiculturalism described in the community is found in all sectors of Council work in Darebin. This is important since these types of policies are only as effective as the people who enact them.

Council employees interviewed raised a number of examples. The Darebin library, for instance, has an ongoing schedule of events that include multicultural aspects. These run from children's story time to information sessions about the different communities represented in Darebin. One day, the program might be about the Horn of Africa, the next day, about the Middle East. The objective of these events is to engage children, their parents and ideally the wider community in issues related to countries and cultural contexts other than their own. Through this interaction, it is hoped that education can be fostered which will, in turn, minimise the fear and distrust found in certain segments of the community.

Also recognised are the efforts of local sporting venues and parks, which are used and/or visited by increasing numbers of ethnic groups. In Darebin, for example, a woman's only swimming time was implemented to encourage the participation of groups that are in danger of being marginalised and excluded from public facilities even if it unintentional on the part of the Council.

The parks and recreational areas also employ Council strategies to deal with the many different groups that use them. Because the majority of these are free of charge, they attract community attention. Through the use of customer feedback surveys, Council employees take steps to ensure that different groups enjoy Darebin's public spaces. There are times when the groups might come together, such as cultural festivals that attract wide community attention, and other times when the different groups just want to spend the afternoon doing what they love, whether that be having a BBQ or playing sport. In this, Council employees are demonstrating their commitment to Darebin's policy to diversify centralised services to cater for the diversity of the community. The Council's efforts have been effective in these initiatives, as witnessed in the diverse groups that use these areas on a regular basis. Each is made to feel welcome and comfortable to share a public space and pursue their own interests in the proximity of others.

The objective of these programs, from the Council's point of view, appears to be to create sustainable relationships between the Council and the different communities in the area. Through this relationship, it is hoped that different communities will become more active within the broader community. It is also to ensure that these communities understand the rights and responsibilities of living in the area. For example, it is important for people to understand that they must keep their dogs registered and on a leash in public places, or that they are not to 'wash down' their driveways, as opposed to sweeping the area, during times of water restrictions.

While community relationships are important, there are certain associated concerns. For one, while the Darebin City Council has implemented many different multicultural services and programs, they are not always as widely publicised as they could be. Local businessmen, for example, were concerned that whereas they *had* to be aware of Council policies and practices, the people in the community were not in the same position and thereby not always as well informed as the business sector. The fact that many of the people interviewed, when presented with a list of services, were only aware of a few of them, would support this perception. Most were aware of the widely publicised events, i.e. the street festivals, but were often surprised by even the range of translating and interpreting services available. This is an issue that Council must consider when developing community strategies related to intercultural harmony.

Secondly, Council must also ensure that diagonal relationships (i.e. between the different social groups) are encouraged at the same time that vertical relationships (i.e. between the Council and the different social groups) are formed. Several interviews highlighted community support for programs and/or events that brought the different sections of society together in a social atmosphere.

It should again be reiterated that the Darebin City Council is perceived as progressive in these areas. One Muslim respondent, for example, stated that Darebin was a better environment for Muslims to live in than some of the surrounding areas. The reason given was that Darebin City Council, in conjunction with DECC, has made specific efforts to promote intercultural harmony and understanding between different communities. The importance of this is reflected in the positive social attitudes toward the Cramer Street project. Another Muslim respondent praised the work of the Multicultural Affairs Unit and its efforts in relation to increased intercultural understanding.

### **6.3.3 Proposed Tactics to Overcome Division**

When asked about specific tactics to overcome division, most respondents discussed three types of activities that are already a part of the Darebin repertoire: street festivals, translation/ interpretation services and information sessions. While this is not useful for drafting new services, it does provide information on how the community perceives existing services. It also provides insight into what issues need to be addressed when formulating programs and policies on a longer-term basis.

#### **a. Street Festivals**

Street festivals were always a popular option for people, but this does not imply that this support was offered without reservation. On the positive side, street festivals were

described in one interview as an environment that brings different groups together where there is 'no pressure on the day and everyone feels positive about being together'. For many, community-wide street festivals are an opportunity for the people of the community to come together and celebrate the diversity of the different groups in the area. Other respondents expressed the appreciation for the opportunity to sample different types of food, listen to different types of music and meet new people. This reasoning often emerges because of the entertainment factor involved.

Some concerns were also expressed in relation to street festivals. One such concern was that street festivals often experience limited success either because there is not enough publicity before the day to ensure high levels of participation, or because they are of only limited appeal to the wider community because the group might be too small to attract attention. For some, music and food festivals are, at best, unable to encourage genuine interaction between the different ethnic groups. At worst, they 'exoticise' minority groups and thereby trivialise their experiences and difficulties to the mainstream community in that their entire culture is seemingly reduced to food and dance.

Similar concerns were offered by the Muslims interviewed. Again, there were persistent doubts that community festivals have the capacity to encourage genuine inter-ethnic interaction. Those that even try are moreover seen as rare occasions, since many people (Muslims included) prefer to celebrate within their own groups. Hence, while these events would not be impossible, the coordination thereof would be complicated since non-Muslims might feel threatened to go to a strictly Muslim festival, and conversely Muslims might feel unwelcome or uncomfortable at mainstream festivals. This position was further strengthened in another interview where it was argued that while many Muslims enjoy street festivals, the forms that they take are not always appropriate for the different communities and their cultural and religious practices and preferences.

This does not imply that there is no community support for events that attempt to overcome the barriers to participation mentioned here. By contrast, most people surveyed and interviewed were disappointed that more effort was not being put into the planning of this type of event. There are admittedly some that are moving in this direction. Many schools in the area, for example, already host performances and events that involve a diverse group of participants and report their multifaceted successes. The Muslim teacher interviewed also makes an effort to invite her non-Muslim friends to Muslim celebrations; she also takes little bags of lollies to school during the Eid celebrations to introduce them to other types of festivals in addition to Christmas. This serves as a challenge for the Council to continue these events but to ensure that more planning goes into how to coordinate them in such a way that many different groups are able to participate meaningfully.

## **b. Translation/Interpreting Services**

Both the surveys and the interviews highlighted the importance of translation and interpreting services. Both general and specific indicators of support were given by both the mainstream and migrant communities in Darebin community for government to continue funding for these services. The various responses were moreover nearly unanimous in support for the continuation of all related services. There appears to be a general consensus and understanding by all involved that people cannot access



services and participate in the community if they are unable to understand the range of services and programs available to them in the first place. It thus follows that once the different groups gain an understanding of how the Darebin City Council operates, the opportunity to eliminate many forms of social exclusion and interethnic discrimination would emerge.

Only one person interviewed made negative comments about this issue, but the focus was more on aspects of these services rather than on the services themselves. In this instance, the objection related to Council's tendency to characterise these services as providing information in a person's 'own language'. The argument was that this characterisation encourages migrant groups to view English as a foreign language rather than something that should be learned when living in Australia. A preferable solution would be to state that various forms of information are available in different languages so that people can be given the opportunity to explore channels that will help them improve their English and thereby integrate more fully into the community.

### **c. Information Sessions**

As highlighted by the two surveys, there is overwhelming support for the continuation of information sessions, in particular those about the religious and cultural practices of the different groups in the Darebin community. As described by one Council employee, information sessions introduce the people of the community (if only vicariously) to the various other cultural and religious groups in the community. Further support for these initiatives was provided by a member of the local clergy, who maintains that while there are many different types of education, both formal and informal by nature, educational programs are among the most appropriate ways to fight ignorance and discrimination in the community. In his opinion, reliable information is always an important tool to help overcome interethnic tension and discrimination; it is 'always a great step ahead in the battles of multiculturalism'.

Many within the Muslim community agree with this and view information sessions as a valuable opportunity to share information about Islam in a reliable manner. The argument given is that Australians want to know more about what Islam is about. For some, this desire is a genuine quest for religious knowledge. For others, it is a desire to come to a better understanding of Australian Muslim groups and thereby alleviate their fears. Each reason is valid. Both encourage people to engage in information sharing exercises and provide an opportunity to discover that there are many similarities between Christianity, Judaism and Islam. This process was described in one interview as an opportunity to let different parties talk about their religious beliefs and have the other parties actually listen, to have 'a dialogue rather than an argument or a debate'.

The Darebin City Council, in conjunction with the Migrant Resource Centre, already host group information sessions several times a year. Some of these are available only to Darebin Council employees and are meant to inform them firstly about how to address the needs of diverse customers, but also about how to handle problematic situations when they occur in their office or service delivery point. Various programs and initiatives are also open to the public, i.e. the Cramer Street Project which introduced the community to the Cramer Street Mosque. Other programs for both adults and children are held at the Darebin library, with these in addition to the

library's provision of books, information packages and other resources in various languages.

It was also suggested that frequent programs be designed and implemented in the area schools since children are often the most open to adopting new ideas about equity and how society should operate. It was important that such programs be held at the schools themselves to encourage participation. As confided in one interview, if some of the students are not even motivated to come to class on a regular basis, 'let alone be active members of a Council', the programs must be brought to them.

As discussed in several interviews, these initiatives are important because they have the most potential to change prevailing social attitudes about a wide range of issues. The exact working of multicultural policies is often not the most pressing issue for the sustainability of multiculturalism, or even cultural diversity, especially as policies alone can only go so far towards social change. The immediate (and continuing) need is to find ways to influence attitudinal changes in society, with information sessions one important tool. Other potential solutions are community hub groups, which could enable the development of more intimate relationships in and between the different communities that would become strong enough to survive times of misunderstanding and discrimination.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

The interviews revealed a range of often complex views on multiculturalism within the Darebin community. Many people prefer to use terms such as 'cultural diversity' because they believe that multiculturalism conjures too many negative ideas. Although most responded that multicultural policies give everyone a 'fair go', there are signs that a significant segment of the population believes it to be only applicable to migrant groups. For example, different organisations receive a number of phone calls when they advertise multicultural events asking if 'Aussies' are allowed to attend and participate.

Most interviewees were unable to envisage an adequate policy to replace multiculturalism. While they have serious misgivings about what it has come to represent, they see multiculturalism as the best available option. This reflects the high levels of support that the people of Darebin give to the diverse population in their community and a general acceptance that centralised services should be diversified to serve the needs of different groups.

Darebin appears to have low levels of intercultural tension, with few people reporting that they had witnessed racial hatred or violence in the community. A few significant incidents were mentioned, including the burning of a church and Muslim women being harassed in the classroom or in the street. These incidents are clearly of grave concern and warrant ongoing attention to the potential for intercultural and inter-faith hostilities. In the main, however interviewees are supportive of the diverse ethnic mix. A significant number of interviewees made it clear that they had either consciously decided to live in the area or had taken a job there specifically because of the diversity to be found. Indeed Darebin appears to be considered a 'safe haven' of sorts, where different groups of people feel comfortable to interact.

Much of this is attributed to the Darebin City Council's efforts in this area. Darebin City Council appears to be 'doing something right' and for this reason, enjoys high levels of support from the community. The general consensus is that Darebin City Council is proactive in that it anticipates problems before they emerge, and inclusive in that it consults with the community when making policies and developing programs. It has been identified as a possible role model for surrounding city councils in approaching issues of intercultural harmony and understanding.

The programs that received the most support were street festivals (with some reservations) and information sessions about the different cultural and religious groups in the community and their respective practices. Muslim respondents suggested that such sessions could be used to emphasise that Islam shares much with Judaism and Christianity. They were also seen as an opportunity to educate people as to the differentiation between Islam as a religion and the variety of cultures with which individual Muslims might be associated.

For some people, however, multiculturalism has been unsuccessful, encouraging division in the community rather than bringing people together. This view is sometimes expressed by individuals from the more established migrant groups. From this perspective, multiculturalism has allowed the newer migrant groups to assume the rights of being an Australian without having to shoulder the responsibilities of living in Australia. This viewpoint is wary of what might be seen as 'special treatment' that was not previously available to more established migrant communities. From this perspective, assimilation remains the best policy option.

For the majority of people interviewed, however, diversity makes the Darebin community more interesting and must be protected. Some of those expressing this view were indeed activists for the cause. Through programs and initiatives that are either meant to bring people together and to come to a better understanding of each other, these people constantly promote intercultural harmony. From this perspective there is a clear understanding that this type of social change is long-term, ongoing and requires constant attention to be sustainable.

Almost everyone supported the maxim that ignorance can only be fought through interaction and education. They therefore challenged the Darebin City Council to redouble their efforts to provide events that truly brought the different groups together to share what was most important to them with others. This could be in the form of more inclusive community events or information sessions targeting both children and adults.

In conclusion, there are three generalised groups in Darebin: those that are supportive of multiculturalism and cultural diversity, those that reject multiculturalism as outdated or divisive, and those that support diversity and an equitable provision of services but disagree with exactly how this is to be achieved in practice.

The efforts of Darebin City Council to promote intercultural harmony are overwhelmingly viewed as positive. It is nevertheless important to devote ongoing attention to the development of Council's relationships with different groups and the facilitation of genuine interaction between different groups along cultural and religious lines.



## **Chapter 7: Summary and Discussion**

This study began with three basic questions:

- 1) Is multiculturalism, as a policy, losing credibility in Australia?
- 2) Has the level of discrimination against Muslim groups and communities in Australia increased in response to recent international events?
- 3) Is local government the most appropriate vehicle to address intercultural understanding in the community?

These questions are addressed briefly below with reference to the literature survey and qualitative and quantitative data from surveys and interviews in the City of Darebin. A series of discussion points are then raised which relate to the themes of promoting intercultural harmony with particular reference to Muslim communities in Darebin. Existing policies of Darebin City Council are assessed in light of qualitative and quantitative findings and suggestions made for Darebin City Council's approach to diversity.

### **7.1 Responding to key questions**

#### *1) Is multiculturalism, as a policy, losing credibility in Australia?*

A high level of support exists within the City of Darebin for multiculturalism. The results of surveys and interviews clearly indicated that this was the case with 60% - 75% of the total sample characterised by very tolerant attitudes and strong support of diversity. This group have positive views of multiculturalism as a concept and as a policy practice and demonstrate very tolerant attitudes. They agree that cultural diversity has a positive impact upon Australia in general and upon the community in which they live and work. They strongly support the right of Muslims to live in Australia and practice their religion freely.

More generally in Australia, multiculturalism has become the focus of strong media criticisms. At the extreme of this criticism, some commentators suggest a link between multicultural tolerance and the radicalisation of Muslim minorities in ways that present a threat to Australian society. These, along with more moderate commentators assert that assimilation is a more desirable and pragmatic policy option than multiculturalism. There also remains some cynicism about the political usage of multicultural language and policy both from a pro- and anti-diversity perspective.

A second group of respondents (comprising 15% - 25% of the total sample) are comfortable with some aspects of diversity. These respondents are reasonably supportive of Muslims and multiculturalism but are either unsure of or uncomfortable with some aspects. While they are supportive of the rights and freedoms of Muslims they would not necessarily feel comfortable going into business with a Muslim and are uncomfortable with some aspects of Muslim practice. These respondents hold less tolerant views and may have less confidence in social harmony in Darebin generally.

A third group of respondents (comprising 5% - 15% of the total sample) is not comfortable with diversity, multiculturalism or Muslims and generally holds highly

intolerant views; they would probably not be prepared to hire a woman who wore *hijab*, would not live next door to a Muslim or visit a Muslim household. They do not empathise with Muslims and are not convinced they respect Australian laws or are committed to peace. Approximately 3% - 5% of respondents could be considered by to be 'hardcore racists'. These respondents do not support the rights of Muslims to freedom of religion or freedom of dress. Furthermore, they believe all Muslims should be held accountable for extremist Islamic terrorism and that Muslims want to convert Australia into an Islamic country.

Thus while not under direct threat, multiculturalism remains controversial in Australia and within Darebin. Even where the majority supports multiculturalism in principle, there remains disagreement over what multiculturalism means in practice and which policy initiatives and programs should be supported and funded under a multicultural framework. Negative attitudes towards cultural diversity suggest a need for continued education on these issues. Additionally, disagreement about the desirability, meaning and practicalities of multiculturalism suggests that there is an ongoing need for community consultation on diversity management in Darebin.

*2) Has the level of discrimination against Muslim groups and communities in Australia increased in response to recent international events?*

The literature supports the view that Muslim minorities in Australia have experienced an increase in levels of discrimination in response to specific terrorist attacks and the 'War on Terror'. Media and policy views which are directly or indirectly hostile to Muslim minorities have the potential to influence a population characterised by heightened anxieties and feelings of insecurity in the context of the current international security environment. Such influence is likely to be pervasive in Darebin, given that most survey respondents (70-80%) indicated that their primary source of information about Muslims was the media. At the same time, a strong majority of respondents are also sympathetic to Muslims on account of the current political environment and recognise that they have been treated unfairly on account of an unjustified association with terrorism.

More than one third of staff respondents were aware of tensions between different ethnic groups in Darebin as well as incidents of ethnic and/or religious discrimination. While a lesser percentage of community respondents reported such awareness, numbers were still significant. While they did not specify whether particular ethnic groups were targeted, interview respondents overwhelmingly indicated that such tensions and incidents were highly applicable to Muslims and that discrimination against Muslims had increased dramatically since the events of September 11. Interviewees related incidents in the post-9/11 context including physical attack, surveillance, verbal harassment and avoidance. They referred to a situation whereby Muslims see themselves as having been singled out and targeted by the Australian government and viewed with suspicion by mainstream society.

These incidents include traditional forms of racism, that is, openly confrontational incidents such as physical assault. In the current context, however, racism and discrimination have become socially unacceptable and people are generally more likely to hide or be unconscious of racist or discriminatory behaviour. Newer forms of exclusion and racism may well take the form of avoidance tactics rather than

overtly hostile behaviour. Muslim interviewees articulated their experience of this type of discrimination in the post 9/11 context.

The concept of newer forms of racism may also help to explain why a majority of respondents may well express positive views of multiculturalism and Muslims yet still maintain indirectly discriminatory forms of behaviour. The influence of the media in subtle and unconscious ways may also be a significant factor in this respect.

*3) Is local government the most appropriate vehicle to address intercultural understanding in the community?*

A wide range of literature supports the view that local government is the most appropriate vehicle to address intercultural understanding in the community. Staff and community in Darebin are overwhelmingly in support of the role of their Council in this respect. They accept local government as central to promoting intercultural harmony since it is the level of government closest to the people and they applaud existing services promoting cultural diversity.

In particular, Darebin's Multicultural Affairs Unit and DECC were praised for their initiatives and were credited with helping organisations create effective multicultural policies and practices throughout the various branches under Council jurisdiction. A high level of support was also indicated for translating and interpreting services and the Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project.

Support for Council notwithstanding, there are significant numbers of Darebin residents who are either unaware of the different services and events offered by Council or uninterested in participating in Council business. This situation reflects broader trends identified within relevant literature and presents a challenge for Council in terms of publicising their activities and maintaining a high level of community engagement in diversity management.

Those more informed about Council initiatives articulate views and suggestions about ways in which approaches to diversity could be improved and ways in which the conceptual framework for multiculturalism could be revisited. This suggests that there are well developed resources within the community to inform and strengthen Council strategies.

One of the challenges for local government, both in Darebin and more generally, is to develop its approach to cultural diversity whilst addressing the perception identified in both the broader literature and the Darebin community surveys, that multiculturalism unfairly favours cultural minorities and discriminates *against* majorities. The challenge, in other words, is to represent an inclusive concept of diversity and multiculturalism that has positive outcomes for both cultural and religious minorities *and* mainstream groups.

## **7.2 Discussion and Suggestions**

### *Discrimination against Muslims in the post 9/11 context:*

Misperceptions about Muslims and Islam identified via the research clearly relate to the post 9/11 security context. Doubts about whether Muslims are able to integrate into Australian society or whether Islam is compatible with democracy have only become popularised since 2001 and reflect broader anxieties about general physical and cultural security in the context of terrorism and globalisation. Hence incidents of discrimination against Muslims (such as neighbours of a Muslim woman mistaking the ticking of a broken electrical appliance for a bomb) reflect a heightened sense of insecurity. Attempts to reduce the frequency of such incidents and to challenge discriminatory views held against Muslims in Australia need to address *both* the stereotyping of Muslims *and* the feelings of insecurity that drive such behaviour. In other words, while sharing characteristics with more familiar patterns of racism against other migrant groups, the situation of Muslims in Australia and Darebin is also *specific* to the current political context and requires specific strategies in response.

### *New forms of racism:*

New forms of racism (see section 2.2.2) may help to explain the discrepancy between positive views of multiculturalism and incidents of cultural and religious discrimination. The positive views about multiculturalism expressed by an overwhelming majority of research respondents may well reflect the fact that racism and overtly discriminatory behaviour and opinions are now socially unacceptable. Hence racist and discriminatory sentiment may either be consciously withheld from survey and interview responses, and/or unconsciously exhibited in indirect ways (such as avoidance). Strategies attempting to combat and prevent racist and discriminatory behaviour must be informed by an awareness that those exhibiting such behaviours may not identify (verbally or consciously) as doing so.

### *Addressing the sense of alienation from mainstream Australia:*

Regardless of the precise frequency of racist and/or discriminatory behaviour directed against Muslim Australians, the fact that all Muslims interviewed articulated a sense of alienation from mainstream society is of concern in and of itself. Muslims within the City of Darebin feel that they are targeted by the Australian government, that they are vulnerable to physical and verbal abuse, and viewed with suspicion by the mainstream population. These feelings are prompted by specific incidents and experiences confirming their vulnerability. However, there appears to be a disconnect between the feelings of alienation expressed by Muslims in Darebin and the generally supportive sentiments (towards multiculturalism and Muslims) expressed by survey respondents. As noted above, new forms of racism may help explain this disconnect. Alternatively, there may be a case for promoting greater communication between Muslim and non-Muslim residents – not only to dispel stereotypes amongst non-Muslims, but also to bring Muslims in contact with sympathetic neighbours. Such



encounters may help to reduce Muslims' feelings of alienation in each of these two ways.

*The need for mutual dialogue:*

Within the literature it is widely recognised that social cohesion is fostered less by assimilation of minorities into a homogenous majority culture and more by an exchange of ideas between mainstream and minority groups. This requires a process of mutual dialogue and policies formulated to encourage genuine exchange rather than toleration of difference.

Research findings suggest that within Darebin there is strong support for the notion of mutual dialogue, a belief that communication and exposure to difference helps to dispel stereotypes and emphasise commonalities, and a strong desire to learn more about minority cultures and religions, particularly Islam.

Nearly 40% of community respondents report interaction with Muslims at work, and nearly 70% report interactions at work with people of cultural backgrounds different to their own. Hence, in council strategies, workplaces may provide a focus for the promotion of intercultural dialogue. Workplaces may also be appropriate venues for such encounters since participants would already be on location and would thus incur fewer obstacles in attending specific activities.

Community respondents were strongly supportive of social interaction (street festivals, for example) as ways of fostering intercultural exchange and learning about other groups. At the same time, there was concern that such events did not always result in opportunities for *meaningful* exchanges. Some noted a tendency for such events to be focused on food and dance and thus to exoticise cultural minorities rather than producing a mutual, two-way encounter that emphasised commonalities. While such events were generally perceived as a success, there remains a need to reflect upon how further and more meaningful opportunities for intercultural dialogue can be fostered in these contexts.

There is also strong support for formal and informal information sessions, held specifically for the purpose of increasing understanding of minority cultures and practices. In particular, these were popular with Muslims who viewed such sessions as a valuable opportunity to share information about Islam in a reliable manner and as a way of promoting dialogue rather than debate. Informational exchanges between schools and religious groups provide another opportunity for such exchanges. It is important to hold such sessions in locations requiring a minimal effort to access. Hence schools and workplaces (which people attend in the course of daily activities) are especially appropriate venues.

*A different approach to diversity?*

A number of respondents indicated ambivalent feelings about a range of cultural practices rightly or wrongly associated with Islam and Muslims. For instance, while many were supportive of the right to religious expression they were uncertain whether Muslim families should be permitted to exclude their children from particular activities at school on religious grounds. Others, who were fully supportive of Muslim women's choice to wear *hijab* were diametrically opposed to female circumcision.

Two important points are raised by these feelings of ambivalence that are relevant for developing approaches to cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

1. There is a need to distinguish between an objection to certain practices and an objection to the people who practice them. Intercultural harmony does not imply that any kind of practice justified on cultural or religious grounds should be accepted. Rather it implies that such practices should not be rejected *simply because* they are associated (rightly or wrongly) with a particular cultural or religious group.
2. There is a need to distinguish between religion and culture. This is a point raised by Muslim interviewees who argued that there is confusion over Islam, the religion, and the highly varied cultural groups to which any particular Muslim might belong. These cultural groups range from those associated with particular historical traditions (where female circumcision might be common, for example) to those associated with liberal western countries (for whom female circumcision may be viewed as intolerable). In many cases, certain practices justified in religious terms may have more to do with culture or geography than religion.

*Darebin council's framework for approaching cultural diversity:*

Darebin council's framework for approaching cultural diversity can be summarised by the following three shifts in policy emphasis (see also section 4.2.1):

- a shift from majority and minority cultures to relationships between groups;
- a shift from the special interests of particular groups to the benefits of diversity for the community as a whole;
- a shift from integration into a homogenous culture to an openness to productive dynamics produced by diversity.

As a result of these shifts the management of cultural diversity is now seen as part of council's core business with an emphasis on building an ongoing capacity to respond to change.

The research findings in this report suggest that this framework is well positioned to encompass the needs of the Darebin community in terms of promoting intercultural harmony. The emphasis on productive dynamics (or positive change) and overall community benefit is especially appropriate in a number of ways:

- The emphasis on **change** allows for approaches and initiatives that respond to the *specificities* of intercultural tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim residents in the post 9/11 context. The emphasis on change acknowledges that strategies formulated in this context will be different to those developed for different groups and at different times, yet incorporates those strategies within a common overarching framework.
- The emphasis on diversity's benefit for the whole community will be important in combating the perception that multicultural policies are 'only for migrants'. This perception was identified as significant both in general literature and amongst a minority of the Darebin community. Even if residents are supportive of multicultural policies there is a persistent view that these services are ethno-specific and not open to the general public. More

negatively, some residents take this assumption further, holding the view that multiculturalism is a divisive policy approach that unfairly privileges the interests of minority groups over those of the mainstream. These negative associations are a challenge for local city councils in Australia. While Darebin has addressed this challenge in its strategic framework, the task remains to make the benefits of diversity and of projects associated with it evident and obvious for the wider Darebin community.

*Learning from Muslim intercultural practice:*

Interviews revealed that Muslim leaders in the community are undertaking a variety of training and activities to help Muslim youth develop an identity that still retains their Muslim beliefs but adapts to life in Australia (see 6.2.3). These activities potentially correspond with the framework for cultural diversity that Darebin council has developed. As such there is scope for council to work with Muslim leaders and organisations in order to learn how they go about promoting intercultural harmony, particularly from the perspective of a group which typically experiences discrimination. Such a collaboration would reflect the two-way exchange mentality that Darebin City Council has taken in regard to the productive dimension of diversity. In other words, the approach is not only about taking services from mainstream organisations to minorities but also investigating what different groups can learn from each other.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Darebin City Council and Multicultural Policies and Practice**

# Darebin City Council and Multicultural Policies and Practice

## Contractual Obligations:

### **1975                    Racial Discrimination Act**

The Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA) makes racial discrimination unlawful in Australia. The legislation covers all of Australia and can be used to ensure that everyone is treated equally, regardless of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin. The RDA covers discrimination in areas such as employment, renting or buying property, the provision of goods and services, accessing public places and in advertising.

### **1995                    Racial Hatred Act**

The Racial Hatred Act 1995 extended the coverage of the RDA to allow people to complain about racially offensive or abusive behaviour. It aims to strike a balance between two valued rights: the right to communicate freely and the right to live free from vilification. This act covers public acts which are done, in whole or in part, because of the race, colour, or national or ethnic origin of a person or group, or are reasonably likely in all the circumstances to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate that person or group.

### **1998                    Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society**

In 1998, the federal, state and local governments adopted the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*. According to the Charter, local council services must be committed to the following seven principles:

- 1) Access
- 2) Equity
- 3) Communication
- 4) Responsiveness
- 5) Effectiveness
- 6) Efficiency
- 7) Accountability

Expanding on these principles, local councils must ensure that government services are not only available to ‘everyone who is entitled to them’, but they should be should not be based on discriminatory practices, they must be administered on the basis of ‘fair treatment of clients’, *and* they must be publicised so that those who are entitled are aware of the opportunities available to them (*Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*, 1998:8).

## **1999 Best Value Policy**

The Best Value legislation was introduced by the Victorian State Government to replace the previous policy of Compulsory Competitive Tendering. This legislation was adopted by the Darebin City Council, and its principles were used as a foundation for the formulation of Darebin's Best Value policy. With this, each of the 56 service units in Darebin 'underwent a review of its operations with the aim of improving the service and rendering it more responsive to the needs of the community'.

## **1999 Access and Equity Audit**

In conjunction with the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*, the Darebin City Council decided to 'conduct an audit on its performance in meeting the needs of its culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse communities'. The audit consisted of community consultations, internal interviews with key directors, managers and council officers, and the formulation of a final audit report presented to the council at the end of the project.

## **2002 Valuing Cultural Diversity**

This policy statement outlined four core principles for the Victorian Government's whole-of-government approach to cultural diversity and outlined priority action for the future. The core principles identified were:

- valuing diversity;
- reducing inequality;
- encouraging participation; and
- promoting the social, cultural and economic benefits of cultural diversity to all Victorians.

## **2003 Memorandum of Understanding**

By signing a *Memorandum of Understanding* with the Darebin Ethnic Communities Council on 27 August 2003, the Darebin City Council has created an 'on-going relationship' with its community, as characterised by its commitment to the following:

- regular consultation sessions;
- testing new ideas;
- implementing projects; and
- regular reporting on the progress made.

According to the Memorandum of Understanding, there are five targeted components to building a diversity management capacity at the City of Darebin:

1. Information, Awareness and Communication
2. Committed People
3. Accountability, Performance Measuring and Reporting
4. Best Value Service Reviews
5. Innovation, Leadership and Special Projects

## **2003 Diversity Policy**

In recognition that ‘everyone in the community has their own special needs and wants’, and that local government is characterised as the ‘closest to the people’, it must communicate with all segments of the community in order to understand the overarching needs of all minority groups. From these objectives, Darebin City Council outlined five major components of building their approach to diversity. These are:

- regular consultation sessions,
- leadership; committed people,
- communication; information and awareness,
- resourcing; training and support,
- performance; ‘Best Value’ accountability,
- innovation; special projects.

The objective was to ensure that the Council’s commitment to diversity is more than just policy, but is instead operates as an ‘ongoing program of innovation’. To this end, the Darebin City Council adopted the following ‘Best Value’ principles:

1. All services must meet quality and cost standards.
2. All services must be responsive to the needs of the community.
3. A service must be accessible to those for whom it is intended.
4. A Council must achieve continuous improvement in its provision of services.
5. A Council must develop a program of regular consultation with its community in relation to the services it provides.
6. A Council must report regularly, at least once a year, on its achievements to its community in relation to the ‘Best Value’ principles.

## **2004 Multicultural Victoria Act**

The *Multicultural Victoria Act* (MVA) is the ‘first legislative instrument in Victoria that enshrines the principles of multiculturalism in law, in addition to requiring government departments to report annually to the Minister of Multicultural Affairs on their achievements and forward plans in the multicultural arena’.

According to the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, the MVA ‘provides a set of principles, incorporates the whole-of-government reporting requirements and incorporates the *Victorian Multicultural Commission Act*’ into the Victorian Government’s response to multiculturalism. The objective of the MVA was thus to gain recognition of Victoria’s cultural, religious, racial and linguistic diversity, but also to promote the state as a ‘united community with shared laws, values, aspirations and responsibilities’.

## **Multicultural officers and councils**

### ➤ **Victorian Multicultural Commission**

According to the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004*, the **Victorian Multicultural Commission** consists of a Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and not less than five, and not more than ten other members, who are appointed by the Governor in council on the recommendation of the Minister. The Commission's objectives are as follows:

- to promote full participation by Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the social, cultural, economic and political life of Victoria,
- to promote access by Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities to services made available by governments and other bodies,
- to encourage Victoria's CALD communities to retain and express their social identity and cultural inheritance,
- to promote co-operation between bodies concerned with multicultural affairs,
- to promote unity among Victoria's CALD communities, and
- to promote a better understand within Victoria of Victoria's CALD communities.

### ➤ **Darebin Ethnic Committees Council**

The Darebin City Council was established in 1994 through the amalgamation of two councils: Preston and Northcote. As early as the late 1980s, the Northcote council employed an 'ethnic services development officer', who was to focus on the multicultural development of the community.

In 1986, the Northcote Ethnic Communities Council was established, which subsequently became the Darebin Ethnic Communities Council (DECC). The DECC is a 'peak body representing over 70 ethnic groups and associations', that acts as a consultative body and works with the Council 'for developing appropriate programs and services to meet the diverse needs of the community'.

### ➤ **Multicultural Affairs Unit**

The Darebin City Council employs a Multicultural Affairs Manager with a support team. At the time this research project was undertaken, Dalal Smiley was the Multicultural Affairs Co-ordinator.

## **Municipal Multicultural Services**

The Darebin City Council provides diversity related information in all position descriptions. After employment, the Council provides annual diversity training programs for all employees at levels commensurate with their roles and responsibilities.

### ➤ **Multilingual and Translation Services**

The Darebin City Council offers a **Multilingual Communication Service (MCS)**, which allows Darebin residents the opportunity to communicate with Council in their preferred language. These services can be accessed either ‘over-the-counter’ or by the telephone.

The MCS is an in-house communication service that consists of a Multilingual Telephone Line (MTL) operated by:

- A pool of Language Aides (LAs)
- On-line multilingual information
- A centralised translation service.

The Darebin City Council offers a **Multilingual Telephone Line (MTL)** that allows residents who call in with a question or complaint to state their preferred language, after which time they will be transferred to either a Council Language Aide or a Translator to ensure that their enquiry is handled in an efficient manner. Information about this service is distributed through posters displayed in all the Council’s venues, and in other local agencies such as the Migrant Resource Centre and the Adult and Multicultural Education Services.

The MTL is monitored on a regular basis and reviewed annually. This process involves an analysis of the information provided into a specific database created for the use of the Council LAs. The types of information supplied include the following:

- the number of calls made to the MTL,
- the type of calls received and the services and/or departments accessed,
- the topic discussed during the phone conversation,
- how long it took to complete the call,
- the language used,
- the outcome of the call (i.e. whether or not the task was successfully completed by the LA or whether the caller was referred to a professional interpreter.

The information is then coded by a ‘computer application specifically designed to store, retrieve and analyse the data recorded’. Through this analysis, the Council is able to monitor the languages used most often, determine the level of demand for each language, review the success of the service and formulate what changes are needed to make the service more efficient and user-friendly.

The Darebin City Council has created a **Corporate Letterhead** that includes translated messages in 12 languages on the back that directs residents to the MTL for further instructions on how to access council services. In accordance with the *Memorandum of Understanding*, Darebin City Council is committed to ensure that all Council written information and publications be accessible to the City’s major CALD communities by 30 June 2006.

Darebin City Council offers a **Multilingual Website**, which is available in the top 12 languages of the Darebin community, including Arabic, Bosnian, Chinese, Croatian,



Greek, Italian, Macedonian, Portuguese, Serbian, Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese. (See Darebin's website: [www.darebin.vic.gov.au](http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au).)

The Darebin City Council has created **Multilingual Communications Guidelines** that instruct Council staff on how to communicate with residents that either do not speak English well or prefer to speak in a language other than English; they also give advice on when Language Aides and Professional Interpreters should be consulted.

The Darebin City Council has also compiled a **Multicultural Resource Directory**, which contains listings of over 600 groups, associations and organisations that either offer public services to specific ethnic communities, or that advertise the small (independently run) businesses in the community.

#### ➤ **Employment and Utilisation of multilingual personnel**

Since March 2000, Darebin City Council has employed **Language Aides**, who 'provide basic interpreting services to council staff in their interaction with citizens who have difficulty communicating in English or who prefer to communicate in a language other than English. The LAs are bilingual council staff and are paid an annual language aide allowance in addition to their normal salary. Once becoming an LA, these individuals undergo specific training and assessment programs that orient them to basic Council services, outline their responsibilities and the way to go about them, as well as the reporting arrangements for reporting difficulties that they might encounter.

Darebin City Council also uses **Professional Interpreters**, who are engaged to interpret for lengthy interviews or in situations that involve statutory requirements as in signing legally binding documents or in giving warning about a breach of a Council by-law. The Council utilises two main Language Service providers: 1) VITS LanguageLink and 2) the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS). The services of a professional interpreter can be accessed via the telephone, or they can alternatively be booked to attend on-site interviews or meetings.

### **Institutional Services that protect against incidents of racism**

#### ➤ **Australian Arabic Council**

The AAC runs proactive projects; researches the effects of, and develops, implements and advocates for wide-ranging solutions to racism. In addition, they promote human rights and community relations. The AAC also maintains an advocacy and communications dialogue between the media, government, community organisations, business and the public, in which it constantly raises the profile of issues of concern to all Australians.

#### ➤ **Darebin Ethnic Communities Council**

DECC is a peak body which seeks to represent the views and interests of Darebin's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. DECC's role is to act as a consultative body to the Darebin City Council for developing appropriate programs

and services in order to meet the needs of Darebin's CALD communities. The primary objectives of DECC are:

- to understand and represent the interests of Darebin's CALD communities,
- to promote multicultural values and practices in the City of Darebin,
- to act as an advocate of multicultural values and practices,
- to lobby for the provision of culturally appropriate services in the City of Darebin,
- to stimulate a multicultural perspective on public policies and community programs,
- to listen to local ethnic groups and be familiar with current and past needs,
- to advise Darebin City Council and other relevant organisations on the needs of local ethnic groups,
- to provide effective channels of communications between local ethnic groups, Council and key community organisations, and
- to assist local ethnic groups and organisations to support their own communities.

#### ➤ **Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria**

The Equal Opportunity Commission asserts that all Victorians, regardless of the ethnic or cultural background have the right to equal treatment when applying for a job, asking for a loan or renting accommodation (to name only three examples). According to the EOCV, the steps for handling discrimination are as follows:

- Step 1: Try to resolve the matter informally
- Step 2: Get Advice
- Step 3: Make a Complaint
- Step 4: Investigation Phase
- Step 5: Resolution through VCAT

#### ➤ **Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)**

In line with the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 and the subsequent Racial Hatred Act 1995, anyone who has been the victim of an unlawful act can investigate the validity of their claim by contacting the HREOC.

#### ➤ **Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV)**

The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) is the peak body for Muslim organisations in Victoria, and represents Victoria's Muslim communities through its 26 member organisations throughout metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria. The primary objectives of the ICV are:

- to provide representation of Muslim in Victoria through advocacy, consultation and cooperation with governments, other faith communities, service providers, the media and the general public;

- to promote an accurate, informed and positive understanding of Islam, Muslims, and issues important to Muslims to the wider Australian public;
- to advocate with respect to the civil rights of all Australians, regardless of their ethnic or cultural backgrounds;
- to promote understanding, cooperation, tolerance and respect between all faiths;
- to empower and encourage the Muslim community to continue to be actively, responsibly and positively integrated into mainstream Australian society;
- to provide special services to improve the welfare of disadvantaged groups in Muslim communities;
- to develop such a capacity within the diversified Muslim communities; and
- to facilitate cooperation, unity, and positive working relationships within the Muslim communities, and between the Muslim communities and the wider Australian community.

➤ **Islamic Women’s Welfare Council of Victoria (IWWCV)**

At present, the IWWCV offers counselling services to Muslim women on a wide range of issues. The long term goals of the IWWCV are to set up a ‘crisis line’ and an ‘information line’ for Muslim women, girls and children who encounter difficulties in the community or in their personal life.

**Community Initiatives and Special Programs financed by the Council**

➤ **2003 Managing Diversity Conference**

The City of Darebin Managing Diversity Conference was held in October 2003. It was hosted by the City of Darebin in association with the Victorian Multicultural Commission and DECC. The conference was planned as an opportunity for community groups, policy officers and representatives to discuss multiculturalism and diversity. It was a key opportunity for community groups, policy officers and representatives to discuss multiculturalism and diversity

It was targeted at people working in positions where they were leading and managing change in the diversity area. Keynote speakers included Laksiri Jayasuriya (eminent Western Australian Emeritus Professor), Debra Dodgson (National Manager of Workforce Diversity for Australia Post), Neil Edwards (Executive Chairman of the Port of Melbourne corporation), Pat Quirke Parry (head of Sales at SBS), Dr. Sev Ozdowski (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioner), Alastair Nicholson (Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia), and Harriyet Babacan (Executive Director of the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Queensland).

Other speakers were from Melbourne University, Monash University, the Mt Eliza Business School and RMIT University, as well as a small number from the UK, USA and New Zealand

### ➤ **2004 The Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project**

The Cramer Street Project was funded under the Australian Government's *Living in Harmony* initiative, was administered by DIMIA, and involved a partnership between the Darebin City Council and representatives from the Cramer Street neighbourhood. This project responded to community tensions between people of different religious orientations in the northern suburbs of Melbourne.

This project included a number of consultative projects and two detailed surveys. Cramer Street was the focus of the project, in part, because it is home to the first Islamic Mosque in Victoria, Omar Bin Khuttab Mosque, established in 1975. Over 10,000 Muslims attend the Cramer Street Mosque.

The primary objective of the Cramer Street Project was to 'tackle racial tension amongst people from diverse backgrounds living in the project area'. Project aims included:

- the development of a neighbourhood focused program which creates opportunities for neighbours to socialise, mix and enjoy cultural, social and educational activities;
- the minimisation of isolation and segregation between neighbours which arise out of differences in ethnicities, culture, religions and languages;
- the reduction of conflict in the neighbourhood due to intolerance of difference;
- the increased understanding and appreciation of difference; and
- the promotion of the concept of inclusive neighbourhood.

Through this project, community residents were provided a prime opportunity to come together, learn from each other and thereby reduce previously held prejudices and misconceptions about the different religious groups in the area (*Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project: Reference Guide*, Darebin City Council, 2004).

The vision that was formulated through the consultation sessions with area residents was that the Council policies should be more inclusive of ways to improve interfaith relations in the City of Darebin. As a result of the Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project, Darebin City Council was prompted to create a 'community consultation program' that included the entire Darebin community and sought to understand the community's views and understanding of how they, as a community, relate to issues of faith.

This program culminated in the production of the *Interfaith Consultation Report* in April 2005, which illustrated that Darebin residents were interested in gaining more information about other religious practices, especially in conjunction with interfaith initiatives. According to this report, the people of Darebin 'indicated that social interaction and gatherings were the most effective ways of learning about other cultures and religions' (Lum *et al*, 2005:6-9).

### ➤ **Local Events in the Community**

The Darebin City Council hosts the following **Local Events** to promote social cohesion and intercultural harmony:

- Refugee week
- Cultural Diversity week

- Harmony day
- Neighbourhood Festival Day
- The Festival of Kites to celebrate Chinese and Indian culture in the community
- Ethnic Festivals and other occasional events

#### ➤ **Library Initiatives**

Darebin community libraries have books and resources available to people from many different ethnic backgrounds, including an advertised Arabic section.

Ethnic specific children's programs are held in the Darebin community libraries to encourage: 1) higher participation levels by people from non-English speaking backgrounds; and 2) greater exposure to the different communities in the Darebin community. Through this program, local children are introduced at an early age to the benefits of cultural diversity.

The Darebin library system also hosts other culturally specific events, such as the public launch of Arabic DVDs or CDs into the library collection.

#### ➤ **Youth Initiatives**

Darebin City Council encourages the operation of various ethnic specific programs in the community, including:

- The African Youth Access Program
- The Decibels Koori Hip Hop Night

#### ➤ **Community Initiatives**

Darebin City Council encourages local organisations to provide culturally specific services to the community, including:

- 'Meals on Wheels' serving **Halal food** to cater for elderly members of the local Muslim population.
- The provision of **Women's Only swimming programs** at local swimming pools
- The **UN Room** in the Reservoir Civic Centre offers shared facilities for meetings and office space for ethno-specific groups, agencies and out-posted workers.

#### ➤ **Listening Posts**

Darebin City Council hosts 'Listening Posts' throughout the community to gather local opinion about various projects. The most recent 'Listening Post' was in April 2005, where people were asked for their opinion on the opening up of a local oval to public use and the redevelopment of the forecourt of one of the Council buildings. To ensure that all residents are able to express their opinion, professional translators are brought in on the day, with the exact times posted on the Darebin City Council website.



## **Appendix 2**

### **Survey of Darebin City Council employees**

on perceptions towards cultural diversity and multicultural policies and  
how to improve intercultural relations in Australian society

### **Sample Survey Form**





The level of diversity found in the Darebin community makes it a better place to live

The different ethnic groups in Darebin get along well with each other and mix easily in the community

**Q3 Have you witnessed or know of any examples of the following:**

*Choose all that apply:*

- Tensions in Darebin between different ethnic groups
- Cases of discrimination against individuals because of their ethnic or religious background
- Physical violence against individuals based on their ethnic or religious background
- Destruction of properties belonging to individuals from one of Darebin's minority groups
- Other
- None of the above

**Q4 I interact with people from different cultural/religious background...**

*Choose all that apply:*

- At work
  - Through my family and relatives
  - With neighbours
  - At public functions
  - Through my social group
  - Not at all
- (cont. next page)



**Q7 Multiculturalism to me means:**

*Choose all that apply:*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A fair go for everyone regardless of country of birth                               | <input type="checkbox"/> A policy that is threatening to the Australian way of life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom for communities to celebrate their customs and traditions                   | <input type="checkbox"/> A waste of money   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assistance to migrants to help them achieve equality with Australian-born citizens. | <input type="checkbox"/> An outdated policy which is not required anymore           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A way of celebrating everyone's heritage  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A political strategy to win the ethnic vote   |   |

**Q8 Multiculturalism...**

*Choose all that apply:*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> funds specialized services to migrants                      | <input type="checkbox"/> encourages divisions between ethnic groups and mainstream                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> helps to link migrants to mainstream community              | <input type="checkbox"/> discourages ethnic minority groups from integrating into Australian society     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> turned Australia into a cosmopolitan country                | <input type="checkbox"/> encourages ethnic minority groups to disregard Australian customs as irrelevant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> gives Australia a competitive edge in international markets | <input type="checkbox"/> Other   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excludes Anglo-Australians by favouring only migrants       |  |







Local government has a responsibility to educate the general public about the beliefs and practices of the different minority groups in the community.

The current levels of immigration in Australia are too high

More public spending should be allocated to the provision of multicultural services within the Darebin community

It is not equitable to provide different services for the different groups in the Darebin community.

All services should be the same to be fair

**Q14 Have you attended any of the following:**

*Choose all that apply:*

- Equal Opportunity Training (EEO)
- Diversity Training
- Working with interpreters
- Preparing documentation for translation training
- Community profile seminars
- Breakfast seminars
- Other
- None of these above

**Islam is the 2nd largest religion other than Christianity in Darebin. In this final section I will ask you a few questions about people from a Muslim background**

**Q16 My general knowledge of Muslims comes from:**

*Choose all that apply:*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> the media (TV, press, radio)          | <input type="checkbox"/> my family or extended family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> books I read                          | <input type="checkbox"/> my own life experiences      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Observing people in the neighbourhood | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know anything at all |
| <input type="checkbox"/> friends                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                        |









Muslim families should be able to keep their children out of certain classes to which they object to for religious reasons (i.e. sex education, biology, etc.)

Islam is not compatible with Australian values

To help us understand the information you have provided please fill in the following details:

**Q20 How long have you worked at the City of Darebin ?**

Choose One:

- Less than 12 months
- 12 months - 5 years
- 5 years - 10 years
- More than 10 years

**Q21 Which Council Department do you work in?**

*Choose One:*

- Strategy and Governance
- Community Services
- City Services
- Corporate Services or CEOs office
- Culture and Leisure
- Environment and Amenity
- Assets Management

**Q22 What is the highest qualification you have completed since leaving school?**

*Choose One:*

- No further qualification
- Trade Certificate
- Other certificate
- Associate diploma
- Diploma
- Bachelor degree
- Higher degree
- Doctorate
- Other

**Q23 What is your religious denomination?**

*Choose One:*

- No religion
- Christian
- Muslim
- Buddhist
- Other

**Q24 Are you employed as:**

*Choose One:*

- Band 1-5
- Band 6-8
- Annualised with TRP
- SEO or senior officer
- Other

**Q1 What is your country of birth? *Choose one only***

*Choose One:*

- AUSTRALIA
- ITALY
- GREECE
- UK
- NEW ZEALAND
- FYROM
- VIETNAM
- CHINA
- PREFER NOT TO SAY
- OTHER ...

**Q1** Which of the following age groups do you belong in? *Choose one only*

*Choose One:*

- under 15
- 16 - 25
- 26- 35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56- 65
- 66- 75
- 75+

**Q27** What is your gender

Male

Female





## **Appendix 3**

### **Survey of a stratified sampling of residents in the Darebin community.**

on perceptions towards cultural diversity and multicultural policies and  
how to improve intercultural relations in Australian society

### **Sample Survey Form**