

Special points of interest:

- African Settlement Conference update
- 40 years of multiculturalism and still struggling with cultural awareness
- Young Australian Muslim of the Year Winner
- Multicultural Directory Update
- Mum's Driving School

Discrimination or competition?

There has been a bit of attention in the media recently concerning discrimination in the private rental market for vulnerable groups. In a February article, it was reported that a Sudanese family had applied to about 12 different properties and had been rejected each time. Minister Weatherill was cited as stating that 'single mothers, Aboriginal people and new arrivals were among those who felt they had been discriminated against' (reported in *The Advertiser*, 20/2/07 p14). But is this really discrimination? If we approach the issue of access to the private rental market for vulnerable groups via discrimination (i.e. Racial Discrimination Act 1975 or Racial Vilification Act 1996 or Equal Opportunity legislation and so on) we would still fail to address the issue of competition. This is not to suggest that discrimination against some groups does not occur; it is well documented that Aboriginal people in particular experience

discrimination in all aspects of life, not just housing. We are currently living with extremely tight vacancy rates and a reduction in our social housing, which means that there is extreme competition for any available property. Subsequently, landlords and real estate agents have the opportunity to accept only those with a proven track record: a long history in the private rental market, an employment history and a long list of references. And why shouldn't they? Real estate is a business and the agent would not be thanked for not getting the highest return on the investment. For vulnerable groups to compete amid such stiff competition, they also need a history in private rental, a secure income and a few references. Without these important documents they are unable to compete. Therefore, low income earners' ability to access the private rental market is more analogous to the demise of the corner deli once the big supermarkets got extended shopping hours—

they just can't compete. This means that the remedy needed to address this issue in any meaningful way is to empower low income and vulnerable groups to gain these skills themselves. This means getting training to access the private rental market, how to maintain a property, how to report maintenance issues, tenant and landlord obligations and so on. Once they have proven themselves over a few years they will be self sufficient. Yet there are few agencies that have the funding to operate these important services. Anglicare offer a 'How to find a House' course in the city, and anecdotally we have heard that some Private Rental Liaison Officers are doing this on an individual basis. For new arrivals, these services need to be in consistent operation for extended periods of time. Discrimination can too easily be argued and too difficult to confirm, but teaching real skills will empower people for a lifetime.

How to say g'day in Arabic ~ Marhaba (or if Muslim) the welcome is Essalamu Allekum

The Australian Arabic Council indicates that Australian Arabs have been settling and contributing to Australia for over 170 years. Arabic speakers come from around 22 different countries including Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Morocco and some also come from Somalia and Eritrea.

According to the ABS 1996 Census count, it is estimated that there are around 177,000 Arabic speakers in Australia, most are living in Sydney and Melbourne. Adelaide's estimated total of Arabic speakers is a mere 3,607. Useful sites:

For writing and pronouncing Arabic names, go to the www.hejleh.com/tree/neames.html

Bahraini and Arabic Association of South Australia: www.angelfire.com/planet/bahrainau/

Muslim Women's Association: mwa.org.au

Each of these sites has great resources for finding out more about Australian Arabic speakers.

Young Australian Muslim of the Year Competition

Proudly presented by the Islamic Council of Victoria

Website:
www.yamy.info

Email:
info@yamy.info

Congratulations to Yassmin Abdel-Magied! Winner of the Young Australian Muslim of the Year 2007

The Young Australian Muslim of the Year (YAMY) project and award aims to recognise and celebrate the achievements of young Muslims. Recognition of efforts made by Year 9 to Year 12 students to the community by the YAMY award aims to encourage further participation and contribution to the Australian and International community.

The YAMY award is unique in that it places the emphasis on individuals ability to contribute their skills, talent and time to the community, as opposed to recognizing the individual for their skills or talent alone.

Organisers hope that celebrating community service oriented achievements will encourage more young people to contribute, raise the profile of volunteering and charity work, and increase a sense of communal self-esteem.

Nominees will be judged on specific criteria

including:

- Made a significant contribution to the community
- Is an inspirational role model for young people
- Acknowledges Australian/Muslim identity
- Demonstrates a generous spirit and Islamic character
- And shares their resources, skills, experience and time with other people.

This years winner was Yassmin Abdel-Magied, a student from John Paul College. Yassmin was instrumental in introducing the hijab to the ecumenical school's uniform, paving the way for other female Muslim students, and gaining recognition of her natural leadership abilities. As well as being school prefect and Vice-Captain, Yassmin established and heads the College's active Amnesty International chapter, and represented the school in the Youth

Parliament in 2006.

Externally, her list of causes is no less impressive, as a member of ALNISA, the Fair Go for Palestine movement, the Ethnic Community Council of Queensland advisory board, and the Democrats advisory roundtable, to name a few. Earlier in the year, Yassmin was also named club and regional winner of the 2007 Lions Youth of the Year Quest.

A high academic achiever, she is also a member of the College's athletics squad, debating team and girls' First XI soccer squad.

Originally interested in pursuing a graphic design career, Yassmin is beginning to consider how she can best utilize her public speaking and community relations skills after leaving school. Her ultimate aim is to become the Secretary General of the United Nations.

Mum's Driving School

Mum's Driving School
Call Ibtisam on 8281 0707
Or
Mobile 0411 036 159
Or
Dounia Dimachki on 0422 945 630

As many of our readers would be aware, obtaining a drivers license can be one of the most important milestones for refugees as they settle into Australia. Once a visa and housing are secured, getting a drivers license can lead to employment, increased feelings of self sufficiency and freedom, and enable individuals and families to participate in every day life.

However, obtaining your drivers license can be difficult without the necessary English language proficiency and South Australia does not have many multilingual driving instructors.

I recently became aware of Mums Driving School, operated by Ibtisam Dimachki. Ibtisam speaks fluent Arabic and English

and originally started her driving school as a hobby. Now her two grown children have also become instructors and are servicing all areas of Adelaide, from Gawler to Noarlunga. With male and female drivers and English and Arabic languages, Mum's Driving School can cater for a diverse group of customers.

40 Years of multiculturalism and still struggling with cultural awareness

I wonder how many of our readers saw the recent 'Ayen's Cooking School for African Men' on SBS a few weeks ago? The show detailed an innovative approach employed by Ayen Kuol and her colleague Nyiel as they attempted to educate young Dinka men on the importance of cooking. Through the course of her work as a Sudanese health worker in Adelaide, Ayen encountered a number of young men, orphaned or separated from their families through the civil war in Sudan. The men were desperately hungry yet had a fridge full of food. 'I realised these young people looked sick but they were not sick. They said they were hungry, I opened the freezer and there was plenty of food'. They said, 'we don't know what it is and how to do it'. Ayen and Nyiel then set about teaching them how to cook with weekly classes at the Magdalene Centre. In the process Ayen and Nyiel faced a great deal of resistance to the idea, from both the young men and the community itself. The young men felt that they would be unable to find a wife if it was known they could cook, as cooking and the kitchen were generally off limits to males. It was a woman's domain. This belief translates to emasculation of the man, less than a man: for a man to cook is to be a woman. The older women felt that the young men wouldn't be able to cook anything worth eating. Both groups were surprised at the finale when the young men cooked for their elders and they enjoyed it!!

The show got me thinking about a number of issues that have been raised at ASHRA meetings. Last year

there was a strong focus on the housing needs of single unaccompanied men. Often arriving traumatised from long periods of time spent at offshore refugee facilities and having witnessed horrific experiences due to the civil war, these young men required short term, usually single bedroom accommodation for around three months to 'get their head together'. At ASHRA meetings we often discussed at length the best way to achieve this style of accommodation, through head-leasing or developing relationships with real estate agents and so on. What was never discussed, or even raised at an ASHRA meeting, was the need to think about the related supports these new arrivals may be requiring.

Now I am not suggesting that it is possible to anticipate ALL the needs of new arrivals, but Australia has been involved in, and actively engaged with, diverse cultural and linguistic diverse groups for many, many years now. Surely we have a breadth and depth of skill and awareness regarding settlement needs of new arrivals? Or at least the capacity to adapt and respond to needs as they arise? Unfortunately, as Ayen and Nyiel have shown us, it would seem we don't. What so often happens is that there are some that will experience hardship or difficulties simply because they are unfamiliar with the services available, the rules of this country or the cultural and social behaviours of its citizens. This is made even more difficult given the current shortage of available houses, and housing support workers barely have the time to find

accommodation, let alone the capacity to identify or anticipate the related supports that may be required.

My thinking along these lines was reinforced by an incident I witnessed recently while travelling into the city. The bus stopped suddenly to pick up a young Sudanese woman and her two small children. The driver seemed to be cranky because (from what I could gather) the woman didn't hail the bus in the appropriate manner, and therefore he didn't know that she wanted that particular bus to stop. The woman and her children got settled in their seats and the bus proceeded on its way. As the bus filled with passengers, the woman gave her seat up to her children and stood, thereby freeing up a seat. However, when the bus reached its capacity with standing room only, an elderly woman got on the bus. This was followed by lots of sighing and grumbling by the old woman and some of the passengers. Because I was raised in Australia, I could imagine why these passengers were annoyed. I believed it was due to the fact that the Sudanese woman didn't make her children get up and give the old woman their seat. This is because in Australia there is a general feeling that we should respect our elders, and this would include giving up our seats, or allowing older people to go before us when standing in line and so on. This 'tradition' is of course changing. The expectations of behaviour I was imbued with as a child, including 'respecting your elders', are quite different to the expectations I have tried to instill in my own children. It

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African Resettlement in Australia Conference by Kerry Grey (Red Shield Housing)

The African Resettlement in Australia Conference was held at the University of Melbourne. April 11-13th 2007

The Conference theme was "Walking together at same speed: A forum to dialogue.....a cultural journey".

For anyone that knows an African, "walking together" or doing anything at the same speed is difficult as Africans work on African Time (no time frames)

Attendees at the conference were as follows:

100 Africans

20 Victorian Police

23 Catholic Services

8 Salvation Army

And others representatives from government, church and community groups.

A total of 326 attended.

The Conference was to reflect the beliefs that both African refugees and Australian society need to come together in the spirit of learning and mutual understanding.

A series of keynote addresses were given; very few case studies and minimal discussion was had. The whole Conference ended up more like a lecture at Uni with no round table discussions. The timeframes

were about 10-15 minutes per speaker and most forums had about 4-6 speakers. Therefore at the end of each session, there was no time to discuss real situations that people found themselves in.

The Conference registration brochure talked about it being a learning experience for new and emerging African communities and the challenges of settling in Australia, as well as the services and support systems available and their capacity building for better integration. It was especially directed as a valuable experience for:

The African Community

Service Providers

Social Workers

State & Federal Reps

Police

Youth, Drug & Alcohol Counsellors

Community Health Reps

Educators

Academics

Business Leaders

Policy Makers

I found the Conference

disappointing as "Housing" was not

on the agenda.

However a Conference to me is about learning and so, once there, set about finding what may help Red Shield's understanding and capacity with current African tenants and any others that may follow. This also meant talking to Africans about what their individual concerns were for their families and communities. Many of their concerns are the same as ours. All the Africans I spoke to (as well as workers) found it hard to believe that the number one issue and/or concern for Africans was Housing and yet this was not up for discussion.

African communities that were represented were Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Eritrea, Somalia, Rwanda, Congo, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Sudan.

The conference talked about migration to Australia: for example in 2006/07 153,000 people migrated, with about 9% coming on humanitarian grounds.

The areas covered by the conference included: Health, Education, Youth, Employment and Community Capacity.

African Resettlement in Australia Conference by Joh Henley (Flinders University)

In April, I attended the 2007 African Resettlement in Australia Conference at which I was presenting a poster on my research. The conference was of particular interest because of its inter-sectorial and cross-disciplinary focus. For example, the more than 10 speakers in the five plenary sessions included politicians with a range of portfolios, health professionals, and representatives of ethnic communities, the Victorian police, the United Nations, private industry and government agencies.

The emphasis on developing recommendations was clear even in the call for papers. People wanting to present a paper were asked to address a problem within its historical context, to develop solutions and ideas for implementation, including indicators of progress. However, in practice many presentations did not follow this format.

The concurrent sessions addressed five broad themes: health, youth, employment, education and capacity building. Housing issues were not directly addressed. There were also other notable omissions. For example, the health stream contained no session on physical health. Delegates were

asked to select one theme. One disadvantage of this approach was that the work of many delegates transcended more than one theme (e.g., education and youth). However, one advantage was that participants in each theme worked together across days to develop policy recommendations to be recorded and disseminated by the conference organiser, the African Think Tank Inc.

The response to the call for submissions was overwhelming. One of the consequences was that there were a very large number of presentations in each of the concurrent sessions. This allowed very little opportunity for delegates to seek clarification or to contribute to discussion of the issues raised in the presentations. Thus, the recommendations that were developed may not have captured the wealth of expertise among delegates.

More than 450 delegates representing researchers, practitioners and policy makers from across Australia attended. However, the vast majority of

presentations at the conference focused on Victoria. The lack of reference to issues, initiatives and practices in other states was often frustrating for delegates who had incurred time and financial costs in attending from elsewhere in Australia.

Other issues that were, surprisingly, omitted included the growing Australian research literature on issues concerning African resettlement and issues relating to pre-departure orientation and initial resettlement experiences.

Despite these limitations, the conference provided a unique and valuable opportunity to meet and hear from a wide range of people working in the area of African resettlement. I commend the organisers for bringing together such a wide range of participants and for organising a conference for which there was clearly such a large amount of interest and need. All of the presentations I heard were of great interest, and many can be downloaded from the website: <http://www.union.unimelb.edu.au/>

40 years of multiculturalism and still struggling with cultural awareness

is now socially acceptable to call your friends parents by their first names, but I continue to address my friends' parents by their title of Mr and Mrs.

This leads me to the first of two points I am attempting to make here. 'Culture' isn't static. It is neither fixed nor permanent. It is not simply something we go to museums to 'see', or attend a festival to 'experience'. Culture is a living and continually evolving way of being, thinking and behaving. The culture of respecting our elders, for example, has changed. An article in *The Advertiser* around this time last year, acknowledged these changes in the context of public transport at least. 'The next time a young person offers you their seat on the bus, tram or train, be sure to accept and say thankyou... because TransAdelaide staff can no longer force school students to give up their seats to full-fare passengers, including the elderly and disabled, because to do so would be age discrimination against the young' (18/3/06 p15). For anyone recently arriving in this country, and not conscious of the Australian culture or the offence some may have taken by not offering a seat to an elderly person, the grumbling and sighing would be at least confusing and perhaps even hurtful. Equally important is that it is events such as these that are used to support arguments of racism, such as 'those people [insert cultural group] are so rude', or 'the [insert cultural group] people are always disrespectful' and so on.

Of course, the critics would argue that surely everyone

(in all cultures) respects their elders. Or that 'respecting our elders' is commonsense or that you pick it up by observing others. The 'commonsense' approach is based on assumptions about the universality of cultures, that we ALL think and value some central or core things and that they will be expressed in the same way. However, while it may be true that there are a number of central tenets of beliefs or values that unite us all, the way we express these values may differ. This brings me to my second point: Australia officially adopted multiculturalist principles in 1977, which has resulted in increased exposure to cultural and linguistic diversity. We are arguably the second most culturally and linguistically diverse country in the world, second only to Israel. Yet we appear to continually flounder when it comes to responding to issues of acculturation.

Cultural awareness training, designed to raise awareness of the beliefs and values of particular cultural groups in order to be more effective in assisting them to acculturate, must first acknowledge that we are living *in* a culture. Think about how far apart we stand to one another when speaking to one another. Do we interrupt when we speak; is it appropriate to touch the speaker? How do we greet one another: do we hug, shake hands, or kiss cheeks? If so, how many times? What so often happens is that the Australian culture is portrayed as if it was neutral or value free. It is expected that people coming to live in this country will and should

learn the values and behaviours of the general population, but how are these things taught? Or is it assumed that 'they will just 'pick it up'?

To effectively meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers as they become integrated into Australian culture, it is important to challenge these assumptions. It is also important to acknowledge that housing is just one part of an interrelated whole. Education, employment, housing and health are of equal concern. For staff and volunteers working with vulnerable groups, they must be allowed the capacity to attend to these related concerns.

This often translates to adequate funding and the time and capacity to deliver services holistically. For example, housing is not simply securing a roof over a family's head. For new arrivals, this can mean introducing the themes related to renting, such as reporting maintenance, getting utilities connected, eligibility for concessions, how to maintain a property, issues about the garden and cleaning gutters and so on.

For cultural awareness training to have any impact upon the general Australian population, we must first acknowledge that we are living in one - not better, not worse and certainly not neutral.

'To effectively meet the needs of refugees and asylum seekers as they become integrated into Australian culture, it is important to challenge the assumption, that new arrivals will just 'pick it up'.



'A man's homeland is wherever he prospers'

Aristophanes
(450BC~388 BC)

ASHRA Vision Statement

ASHRA is committed to developing our network of interested groups and individuals working with refugees and asylum seekers. We wish to provide greater opportunity for leadership and skill development, create strong, informal networks between organisations, provide greater transparency in information sharing, potentially reduce the duplication of services and more readily identify the gaps in services.

ASHRA Meeting dates for 2007

11th July
12th September
14th November

All meetings are held in the Torrens Building, 220 Victoria Square, Adelaide at 3-5pm. Meetings are informal and everyone is welcome to attend.

Upcoming events

The Ethics of Research with Refugees (A workshop)

12 July 2007-06-05 3.30 – 8pm
The Italian Centre, 262 Carrington St Adelaide.
RSVP Josie Covino josie.covino@adelaide.edu.au

FECCA Congress 2007 Empowerment and Inclusion: Australian Cultural and Social Diversity within a global context

July 30-31 2007 Hobart
More information: go to events@fecca.org.au

Refugee Week June 17-23

Refugee Day June 20th

Go to Refugee Council website: www.refugeecouncil.org.au for event information

Multicultural Directory Update

We are currently revising all of our contacts and addresses for the final edition of the Multicultural Directory in preparation for publication.

The headings are listed as:

Emergency Contacts, Ageing, CALD groups in SA, CALD groups nationally, Education and Training, Emergency Accommodation, Employment, Families,

Festivals and Events, Financial, Funding and Grants, Health and Wellbeing, Housing, Language, Legal, Media, Museums, Recreation, Regional and Rural, Religion, Settlement in general and Youth. If you would like to have a service or organisation added to one of these headings, please let us know by email or post (our contact details are in the

left column).

The aim of the directory is to promote as many of the specialist services that are available across the state to the broader community. Once published, the directory will be distributed among schools, TAFES, local councils and libraries and so on. We aim to complete this year's edition by the end of July, so get your services information in!



Shelter SA
Housing: a basic human right

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