



# AGM REPORT 2003

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ISLAMIC WOMEN'S WELFARE COUNCIL *of Victoria Inc.*

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## IWWCV Structure

### Committee of Management:

#### Elected Members

#### Executive Committee:

Leila Alloush	Chairperson
Fikriye Demirel	Treasurer
Tasneem Chopra	Vice Chairperson
Rasheeda Cooper	Secretary

#### Members:

Hulya Akguner
Maryam Clarkson
Dakhylina Madkhul
Inas Moussa

#### Funding Representatives:

Jenny Norvick	DIMIA
Elizabeth Parker	FACS
	R E Ross Trust

#### Acknowledgements:

DIMIA  
Fitzroy and Carlton Community Cooperative  
Federal Department of Family and Community Services  
Reichstein Foundation

#### Staff/ Workers:

Joumanah El Matrah	Manager
Sultan Cinar	Team Leader and Citizenship, Violence and Resettlement worker
Munira Mahmoud	Parenting and Recreation worker
Jaweria Khalid	Young women's Worker
Moona Hammoud	Youth worker
Nuzhat Lotia	SILC: Research and Education worker
Asha Bedar	SILC: Research and Education worker
Sameena Ali	Administrative officer

#### Students and Mentorees:

Maissa Alemeddine  
Fiona Tischmann  
Fairuz Zaitun Ahmad

#### Previous Staff:

Nilgun Olcayoz and Zeinab Muhamod

# IWWCV Objectives and Vision

Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria is a community welfare organisation established and managed by Muslim women for Muslim women. The Council was established in 1991, as a non-religious organisation reflecting the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and sectarian diversity of Muslim women living in the state of Victoria.

The Council developed from the belief that Muslim women occupied a unique place of vulnerability in Australia and that meaningful change in their status could only be achieved through improving the situation of individual women and improving the capacity of Muslim women collectively. To this end, the IWWCV has remained committed to operating as a grass roots organisation, with Committee of Management and Staff comprising solely of Muslim women and reflecting the diversity of the Muslim women.

The Islamic Women's Welfare Council aims to facilitate Muslim women's full participation in Australian society by:

- developing and delivering programs and services to meet the needs of Muslim women in a manner consistent with their values and that of their community,
- empowering Muslim women through information, skill development, support and advocacy,
- promoting social justice, access and equity in the provision of services to Muslim women,
- contributing to the development of knowledge about Muslims at all levels of government, amongst professionals and within the general community
- promoting the complexity and diversity of Muslim women's identities, and building an interconnectedness between women through increased awareness of their common and diverse challenges
- promoting women's right to equality, justice, and self determination as envisaged by Islam
- working to eliminate discrimination against Muslim women both within their community and in the broader social, economic and political spheres of Australia

The council's work has been well recognised by various levels of government, the service system and by the community. Current work priorities of the Council include:

- settlement of newly arrived women into Victoria
- poverty and housing
- violence against Muslim women
- capacity building and leadership development,
- education and training,
- economic participation

**The Council works toward these priorities by;**

- providing a housing and generalist support service;
- undertaking a community education campaign on citizenship and Australian law;
- providing parenting education sessions;
- leadership development of Muslim women ( 3year community education campaign);
- identity development and communication skill development among young women;
- research into sexual violence against Muslim women;
- research into school retention rates among young Arab and Muslim young women;
- working against racial, religious and gender based crimes and vilification against Muslim women
- lobbying and advocacy on behalf of Muslim women.

**Services available to Muslim women :**

All Muslim women living in Victoria are entitled to access all services and programs provided by the Council. Current services operating at IWWCV include:

- Information and Referral
- Individual Casework Support and Counselling
- Range of skill development Group work and Community Education Sessions
- Recreation and Support Groups
- Individual Mentoring Programs
- Volunteer and Student Placements
- Access to IWWCV publications and library

## Chairperson's Report

It is with pride that I present the Annual Report of the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria (IWWCV) for 2003.

IWWCV has continued to grow and build on the foundation provided by its past expansion. This has occurred in the context of a challenging environment, which has placed considerable pressure on us as Muslim women and our support services.

We as Muslim women have been very strong in the current context and have adapted to the growing intrusion of global conflicts on our daily lives. Our community of women have borne the brunt of countless incidents of racial and religiously based attacks and discrimination both in subtle and explicit forms. Therefore, IWWCV's advocacy has become increasingly important.

IWWW remained and extended its commitment to providing professional and highly specialised services for Muslim women in areas of needs.

Our key achievements for this year include:

- Continuation of funding from DIMIA for our highly successful Parenting Program for Muslim women
- Muslim Young women Support Program: This program involved group work and individual support and resulted in a young women conference.
- Homework groups for young women struggling in schools
- A growing presence in rural Victoria which will continue well into next year
- A community education campaign on the Australian Legal System and Citizenship
- A recreation program for isolated women from Horn of Africa
- Leadership program for Muslim women (SILC).

Our page outlining services to women and the community sector speaks volumes about the sheer amount of work that we completed to date, but it may not adequately reflect how very hard staff have worked for Muslim women. I would like to make special note of Joumanah's hard work.

On behalf of Committee of Management, I would like to thank our staff, volunteers and students for dedication and professionalism. A special thanks to Maryam Clarkson who resigned from the committee earlier this year to have her first child. We thank her for all her hard work and dedication to the Council. Her contribution has been invaluable and she will be sorely missed.

Also, I would like to thank the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), the Federal Department of Family and Community Services, R. E Ross Trust and AMES, Fitzroy and Carlton Community Co-operative for their support and making our work possible. At this point IWWCV has not yet acquired the support of the state government and this is an absence we have felt keenly, particularly in the current climate of racial tensions and discrimination.

As this year comes to a close, I hope that many of the negative tendencies within our world today also come to an end.

Leila Alloush  
Chairperson.

## Manager's Report

This annual report brings to an end another exciting and complex year for Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria. The rapid expansion of IWWCV in 2001-2002, alongside a turbulent political-social environment has compelled us into a period of consolidation and self-reflection. This work however has not shifted our focus from what is most important to us: support and advocacy for Muslim women.

In 2001-2003, IWWCV has provided more services and programs to Muslim women than at any other point in its history. In total, we have reached out to women, and worked in partnerships in over 85 services.

Our program commitments have remained:

- ◇ settlement of newly arrived Muslim women
- ◇ poverty and housing
- ◇ education and training
- ◇ economic participation
- ◇ parenting education
- ◇ community education
- ◇ citizenship and the Australian legal system

And research work has continued to focus on:

- ◇ violence against women
- ◇ education and women

It is perhaps worth noting that IWWCV's work into racial and religiously based violence against women, while absolutely central to Muslim women in the current environment, has been enormously difficult to situate this issue as an important one in the broader political sphere.

In my previous two years as a coordinator, the Council has been a space in which the development of new programs has been strongly encouraged. With the programs developed to date, the Council has demonstrated only a willingness to extend its vision of itself, but also its role in the community sector and its place among Muslim women. The development of SILC project, alongside our settlement programs and research projects clearly demonstrate the broad reach of IWWCV and its multifaceted approach to working with Muslim women. I will let the work of our staff speak for itself, but we have also extended into new forms of service delivery and program development; some of these programs are in collaboration with national services.

The growing diversification of our staff has given IWWCV a new type of vitality. I cannot express sufficient gratitude and admiration for the wealth of experience, knowledge and skill staff members have brought to IWWCV, it is because of them, that we have commenced a process of maturation.

I would like to thank Maissa Almeddine, Fairuz Ahmad, both upcoming Muslim women who have undertaken their student placements and much more for IWWCV. I also thank Fiona who is currently doing her placement now. A special thanks to Jihan Martin, Noura, Uzay and Hulya for their volunteer work.

Sadly, Nilgun has moved on from IWWCV, but spent a great 18 months with us in our parenting program. Also, a thank you to Zeinab Mohamud for her short time with us as a caseworker.

A special thanks to our Committee of Management for all their time and enthusiasm, even for the most laborious tasks! Finally, I would like to acknowledge all the women outside IWWCV who have assisted us in our work and indeed, without whom we could not have done some of our work. A heart felt thanks to all the Muslim and non-Muslim women who have been central to the life of the Council.

Joumanah El Matrah

# Settlement and Parenting Worker's Report

## **Team Leader and Settlement ,Citizenship and Parenting Program Worker Sultan Cinar**

2003 has been an extraordinary year for IWWCV. We have been continually improving as well as providing quality services to Muslim women. IWWCV is providing quality service to the community, in the sense that we have excellent communication and networks with the community as well as service providers. Our philosophy has helped us to achieve these excellent outcomes. This philosophy is based on principles of:

- ◇ continual learning, both for staff and management
- ◇ effective networking with relevant bodies and community organisations
- ◇ collective approach
- ◇ ongoing consultation with service users and service providers
- ◇ creating a supportive, safe and healthy environment for staff

In 2003 the Young Women's program and the Parenting and Citizenship and Violence programs successfully completed their work plans. The workers involved were energetic, talented and committed to the work they have done, as is evident in the outcomes.

I would like to thank all staff who have undertaken excellent work. I would especially like to thank Fikriye Demirel for her extensive support of IWWCV staff. Thank-you also to Moreland Community Health Service (Youth Program), Co-Care, Women's Legal Service Victoria and Moreland Hall.

### **Case Work**

The Citizenship/Violence Project provided complex casework. The casework was mainly related to housing, immigration, income support, material aid, citizenship and health. Other cases fell under the categories of parenting, domestic violence and legal problems.

### **Group Work**

Our group work has provided 10 community information sessions with existing women's groups from Afghan, Turkish, Lebanese, Iraqi, Eritrean, Somali and Kurdish backgrounds. Information sessions centered on the Australian Legal System and problems often encountered by newly arrived communities on how to access other available services.

IWWCV also conducted a number of consultation sessions with Muslim women to identify their needs. Outcomes of the consultation showed that majority of women have expressed a strong desire to attend leadership-training programs.

## **Community Consultation and Interviewing Community Leaders**

On Citizenship rights and responsibilities.

- ◇ three different community consultation and discussion groups took place regarding community awareness of rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and the basic functions and principles of the Australian legal system
- ◇ community leaders were interviewed from different cultural and language backgrounds. In all these consultations, education and information regarding the Australian Legal system was identified as a community need.

## **Cross Cultural Training**

IWWCV has also provided to mainstream services cross-cultural training on Islam, Muslim women and their communities in Australia.

Written and verbal feedback provided by participant in our training was very positive. As a result we have been invited to work with these groups for a second time.

## **Our work in the last 12 months has highlighted the following issues:**

- ◇ the Muslim community experiences a great and urgent need to learn about their legal rights and responsibilities, especially regarding family and criminal law
- ◇ incidents of abuse of Muslim women have increased after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 . Muslim women don't feel safe outside of their homes and have withdrawn from social life. They don't know what their rights are and how to address assault or racial vilification issues. They would like to address their issues and to organise social support networks at a local and state level but they don't know how to go about this.
- ◇ the Muslim community is willing to learn, and to take an active role in education programs
- ◇ as an organisation we need to put more energy and time to inform and empower Muslim women to address their concerns and needs at a local and state level.

- ◇ On a wider scale, we need to organise education campaigns on legal rights and responsibilities focussing on family and criminal law. These education campaigns should target and reach each and every Muslim woman from every background.

## Settlement and Parenting Worker's Report

### Parenting and Recreation Program Worker—Munira Mahmoud

Our Parenting and Resettlement program works extensively with newly arrived Muslim women who parent large families or families with children who have significant behavioral issues. Ultimately we work towards facilitating mothers and children's process of settlement into Australia.

My work with women varies considerably from providing parenting support and education, to advocating on behalf of their children in critical situations related to schooling and mental health. The main issues faced by Muslim women are those associated with Centrelink, cross-cultural settlement n, Australian legal system, material support and drug use. I have assisted many clients seeking safe housing for themselves and their children, and have reviewed policy changes, which have significantly extended the waiting period for women seeking public housing.

Because of the continuous burden on Muslim women, I have placed great emphasis on increasing the number current transitional properties. I am working very closely and very well with Metro West, St. Vincents de Paul. At some point IWWCV wants to have its own refuge house for Muslim women in crisis situations. Culturally, it is very hard for Muslim women to attend a regular refugee, and most Muslim women are simply too afraid to use them.

In this program, we also provide secondary consultation service to child/adolescent and parenting services. IWWCV has received repeated requests from services and many organisation have requested further training, with special emphasis on:

- diverse child rearing practices among Muslims,
- relationship of parents to schools,
- intergeneration conflict and
- discussions on multicultural and multi faith issues.

We have also provided a group work service focusing on parenting issues, social interaction and peer support. Eight different group work packages were held in the last two year period. Participant feedback through evaluation forms has been overwhelmingly positive.

IWWCV has participated in regional and statewide networks to influence policy and programs dealing with child/adolescent and effective parenting issues IWWCV's input into the Moreland Multicultural Network Meetings has enabled IWWCV to build protocols for project and casework collaborations. It also played a significant role in the Carlton Local Agency Network and where we advocated for the needs of the Horn of Africa community, (who are a large proportion of residents in the high rise public housing facility in Carlton). Our input into North East Migrant Resource Centre Network meetings has ensured a strong emphasis within the network on sole parent mothers.

I worked with parents who have children with troubling addictions to various forms of drugs. I worked very hard to build relations between parents and children, when children were involved in risky behavior. These have all proved very delicate and complex issues. In the last six months, I have developed school holiday programs for parents and children to give them an opportunity to explore drug dependency and its impact on various family members. These programs also help build trust between the workers and the parents. Alongside these benefits there is also the benefit of introducing community members to each other and to non community members, thereby facilitating intercultural understanding.

### Recreation Program

The recreation program, in partnership with Centacare Catholic Family Services ran very successful programs last year. This grant helps us provide recreational activities and a health education program for Muslim women. This is also the grant, which in partnership with Kingston City Council has facilitated a parents and children's camping trip in school holidays. This project has been received very positively by different communities (of Muslim women), and we have been approached for more programs.

I don't want to pass without thanking CAN, Neighbor Learning Center in Carlton, Family Resource Center in Carlton and Carlton Residential Association, for their support and in joining us in our social gathering and sharing with us the breaking of our fast during Ramadan

There are many more people I want to thank, most especially all the women and services that have worked with me.

# SILC Project Worker's Report

## SILC Research and Education workers Nuzhat Lotia and Asha Bedar

The end of 2002 and early 2003 saw the beginning of an innovative and exciting new project at IWWCV: SILC. SILC stands for self-esteem, identity, leadership and community participation, and is a 3-year personal development and capacity building, workshop-based program, aimed at empowering Muslim women by developing their leadership skills and facilitating their participation in the development of their communities.

The first phase of the project focuses on module and material development, collaborations and research, moving into workshop implementation in its second phase, involving a series of workshops with Muslim women around Victoria, and ending with a network of trained women actively involved in addressing community needs through our support. This third and final phase also includes an in-depth project evaluation. Initially SILC will be working with women from Turkish, Arabic and Horn of Africa language groups, focusing on four main areas, which are divided into separate workshop. The four workshop streams are *general leadership skills* and community participation; leadership against *domestic violence*; leadership in *education and skill development* and leadership in *parenting*. Our goal is that women who participate in these workshops will eventually feel confident enough to be able to serve as resource persons, mentors and leaders for other women in their community. Thus, the workshops are designed to be highly interactive and participatory and in a way in which the participants collectively receive and create information, discuss their views, challenge and critique discriminatory gender attitudes and norms, learn and practice skills and gain more self-confidence. An important feature of these modules is the provision of information on key frameworks that are relevant to them such as diverse Islamic writings, human rights and gender justice.

The SILC project is staffed by two research and education workers, who have combined interests, qualifications, skills and extensive experience in the areas of management, psychology, self-awareness, gender, human rights, violence against women, parenting, education, capacity-building, facilitation, research, writing, project development, participatory approaches and counselling. Sameena Ali is our resource person, responsible for the collection, collation and distribution of information for the project. Joumanah El Matrah is also an active member of our team and directly responsible for the project.

The first six to seven months of our project was spent further developing the project, holding consultations sessions with Muslim women, collecting, documenting and compiling information on issues relevant to them, establishing linkages, developing a reference group for the project and in developing the workshop modules. The consultations with the women confirmed our understanding that the themes that we had identified for the workshops were extremely relevant to their lives. Migration issues, racism, a lack of opportunities for personal development, lack of access to and knowledge of existing resources and gender-based marginalisation, discrimination and violence consistently emerged as critical factors. These discussions further strengthened our belief that SILC needed to conceptualise and apply the concept of leadership skills and training as a broad construct, encompassing not only the acquisition of skills, but also creating a space for a discussion on larger and deeper issues, structures and frameworks affecting women's lives.

By the end of the first phase, we had a 10-member reference group, consisting of key stakeholders in the Victorian social sector and Muslim community, a SILC brochure, four workshop modules complete with group activities and training material and a range of information on relevant issues, services and organisations. The end of this phase and the beginning of the workshop implementation phase was celebrated in the form of a large community launch in August, attended by about 250 people, including a large number of women from the Muslim community and two keynote speakers. The launch was extremely well-received, a direct result being that about 70 Muslim women signed up for the SILC workshops on the very day of the launch.

The process of developing and maintaining linkages, presenting the project at various meetings, monitoring the project and developing material as needed is an on-going one, continuing into the second and current phase of the project. The main objective of this phase, however, involves conducting the workshops. We have recently completed two General Leadership and Community Participation workshop with 27 women: one group consisting of Turkish women (co-facilitated by Sultan Cinar, an IWWCV worker) and the other, both Turkish and Kurdish (facilitated by the 2 SILC workers). The response to both workshops has been overwhelming and the participants of both workshops have reported that they have found the workshops to be very useful in terms of their personal development, the leadership skills that they feel they have gained and the information on broad range of factors. Many of these women are interested in further participating in other SILC workshops and are already talking about doing small community projects for other women in their communities with some support from IWWCV.

Demographics	Number
◆ Number of participants who registered	33
Number of participants who completed	27
◆ Age distribution of participants	
20-29	1
30-39	11
40-49	12
50-59	3
◆ Educational qualifications	
Primary level	10
Secondary level	6
High school	5
Undergraduate	1
Postgraduate	1
Not known	4
◆ Number of years in Australia	
1-9 years	3
10-19 years	9
20-29 years	8
30-39 years	5
Not known	2
◆ Working	11
(machinist, taxi driver, teacher, teacher aide, customer service, journalist, room attendant)	
◆ Student	3
◆ Housewife	13

The response we have received so far validates our hope that the workshops would be motivating and empowering factor for Muslim women. In addition to the very encouraging response received from the participants themselves, we have also continuously received positive feedback from the other organisations and services, many of which have expressed an interest in collaborating with us. In the near future, workshops are planned with Arabic-speaking women, to be facilitated in Arabic. Meetings have also

been held with networks and organisations in Shepparton and possibilities of conducting a workshop there are also being explored. A local Turkish newspaper also covered both the launch and the Turkish workshop.

As with all projects, SILC has not escaped its share of challenges. The start of the project itself was delayed by a few months and will need to be accommodated in the following months. One way of addressing this and saving time without compromising neither the content of the workshops nor our approach may be conducting at least one or two workshops in the form of intensive full-day workshops rather than weekly sessions, as was originally planned. Further, arranging suitable venues for the workshops with suitably sized rooms for group activities and where appropriate child care facilities are also available has also been a difficulty with one of the groups where some of the participants have young children. In the future, care must be taken to explore and book venues a few months before the actual workshop in order to avoid last-minute problems. We also found that we lack sufficient funds to translate the range of training material that had been developed into 3 community languages (Arabic, Turkish and Somali). In the current phase this problem was solved because the Turkish group facilitator was able to translate or arrange free translation for the material used. For future workshops, however, avenues for funding for translation will need to be arranged.

It is important to note, however, that while these difficulties certainly need to be addressed for future workshops, they have not been unmanageable and do not take away from the success that the project has seen in its first year. Also that we expect many more challenges to date.

At the end we would like to say that our first year of the SILC experience has been a very rewarding one for all of us! We have continued to learn throughout the year and have been further motivated by the response that we have received from the participants, who have constantly validated the effectiveness of our approach and workshop methodology and the importance of the issues that SILC addresses. With this encouragement, we look forward to next year, which we hope will be even more productive, meaningful and fun.



One of the SILC Leadership Workshops



Participants at another workshop

## Young Women's Worker's Report

### Jaweria Khalid

I started working with the Islamic Women's Welfare Council in March 2003 as a Young Women's Settlement Worker for the 'Diversity Choices and Communication Program'. It was a great experience to work with Young Muslim women in Melbourne and Shepparton. I really feel committed to working with young women, especially in terms of capacity building. The young women who attended our services are from, Iraq, Bosnia, Lebanon, Kuwait, Turkey, Albania, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Issues raised by young women in our ongoing group work with them include:

- ◇ restricted mobility (due to factors within and outside of their community)
- ◇ pressures of belonging to two cultures
- ◇ issues associated with their identity as young Muslim women and issues associated with cultural representation of Islam and their place in it
- ◇ racial vilification
- ◇ lack of familiarity with service providers
- ◇ limited communication between themselves and their parents
- ◇ concern about educational and work force opportunities into the future
- ◇ limited opportunity to continue education due to geographical and other forms of isolation
- ◇ vacuum of cultural and recreational spaces for young women

I am also working on a research project called "Building Futures" funded by the Invergowrie Foundation. In this project, the IWWCV is running a homework support program in the western suburbs. Our programs operate in Hoppers Crossing and Footscray, because young women from these two areas face particular disadvantage. Our homework programs focus on young Muslim women from ages 12 - 18 who attend both state and Islamic Schools.

The aims of the project are:

- ◇ to identify the barriers young Muslim women experience in accessing secondary education
- ◇ to provide a support service to young Muslim women in Secondary Schools

- ◇ to provide a support service to young Muslim women in Secondary Schools and improve their academics achievement
- ◇ to improve young women's well being while at school
- ◇ to provide the subject support which young women require as homework support tutoring.
- ◇ to provide a workshops on problem solving and skill development

My time at IWWCV has been very rewarding and I genuinely enjoy and admire the young women I have been working with, they are amazing young women.

## Youth Worker's Report

### Moona Hammoud

I started working with the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria in March 2003, as a Young Women's Settlement Worker for the Diversity, Choices and Communication Program. Our Program aims to empower young Muslim women with information, support and the communication skills they need for their successful settlement in a post September 11 environment. We therefore provide casework and groupwork services, because young Muslim women who are newly arrived find settling in a new country can be very overwhelming. Being a young Muslim woman in an Australian context can be very demanding and there are expectations from them to conform. Jaweria Khalid and myself share the one position of this program. Between us, we speak four languages and have a background in youth work, community development and research.

At case work level, young women receive intensive support and coaching to help them deal effectively with problems at home, at school or in the community. Homelessness, financial hardship and inter - generation conflict constitute most of the issues undertaken as part of our casework service. Finding appropriate housing continues to dominate our casework load. Young women with limited English language skills and mobility, require intensive and ongoing support to access permanent accommodation.

Our program works in close collaboration with schools and other organisations and provides support to young Muslim women on individual and group basis. Groupwork sessions were provided in Roxburgh Park Secondary College, Kealba Secondary

## Administration Worker's Report

### Sameena Ali

I started working at the IWWCV in December 2002. It is now almost one year and what a year it has been. I have had a wonderful opportunity to work with an incredible bunch of women, all of whom inspire me in one way or another.

I joined IWWCV at a time when the organisation was in the process of growth. This was a period of transition, change and expansion for the organisation. It meant setting up new infrastructure and systems to accommodate the growth in terms of increased number of workers, bigger projects, busier work schedules, more clients and therefore the need for a reliable support system for the workers to be able to function as effectively and efficiently as possible. Hopefully I was able to make a little contribution to that process!

Part of my role at the Council involves working closely with Joumanah and assisting her in keeping up with her very busy work schedule. This in itself has been very insightful and a huge learning experience for me about the welfare and community sector in Australia.

Other aspects of my assignment include assisting Fikriye Demirel, our treasurer, maintaining an organisational database, producing leaflets, flyers, assisting in the Youth Worker's newsletter production and setting up and maintaining a simple and workable administrative support system for the workers and overseeing the day to day basic functioning of the office systems (make sure those phones keep ringing and the computers don't crash!). It has been just as challenging as much as it is exciting, especially working within very constrained and stretched budgets. I still remember my excitement when we purchased our very own little photocopying machine!

My experience at the IWWCV continues to inspire and educate me every day. It is incredible how small welfare organisations, like ourselves are working relentlessly to aiding migrants in Australia reach out to the larger community and carve a place for themselves in a country they now call home. The value of services the Council is providing to the community cannot be over emphasised enough and this is something that makes me an extremely proud Muslim migrant woman who has had the opportunity to be a part of the process in some small way.

college, Shepparton High, Shepparton and Brunswick Secondary College. Our six - week programs were conducted in Kealba Secondary College and in the City of Shepparton. In the six - week programs, we have worked with young women on the themes of family, communities, conflict and sound communication skills. Ultimately we want to enable young women to negotiate a better outcomes for themselves. An information session about community services, citizenship rights, the legal system and health was also provided. Many newly arrived students from Iraq, Albania, Bosnia, Lebanon, Morocco, Somalia, Turkey, Eritrea and Australia participated in the group-work programs.

The program has also resumed its newsletter publication with the participation of young Muslim women. Through a series of media projects young women have published: 'the Voice of young Muslim women'. The newsletter has become a tool for communication, information sharing and education for Muslim women from across Victoria. Feedback from the young women about the newsletter has been overwhelmingly positive. We are hoping to continue publishing more newsletters in the coming year.

I thoroughly enjoyed this year and love working with young women.



Kealba college group in one of the sessions



Young girls group in Shepparton



Kealba college girls group

## Placement Students Reports

### **Maissa Alemeddine**

On meeting the coworkers at IWWCV, I felt all my nerves go down the drain, everyone was so welcoming and comforting that it took me only a few minutes to settle in. I met Moona the young women's worker, who I am working closely with. I am helping Moona in planning and organising the 'Young Arabic Women's Conference' which is on December 5th, 2003. During my time at the IWWCV, I have attended meetings, participated in school based programs with young women and interviews and gained hands on experience in general office work. I have met so many people through IWWCV, who I can relate to in personal views and opinions, and who one day I wish to relate to in skills, qualifications and experiences.

One particular experience that is memorable was attending a presentation with Joumanah El Matrah, the manager of IWWCV, where she spoke about the misconceptions about Islam and the way in which Muslim women have been oppressed by the society. I felt very proud of her enthusiasm and her compassion. I hope one day when I work in the sector, I can make her proud of me, just as she makes us proud. Joumanah, to me is a real mentor and I am sure her hard work, skills and determination are going to pay off.

Within the office I have learnt to do new things like writing letters to principals of schools and volunteers, co-facilitating group sessions, permission slips to parents and I even created a flyer. All these things have boosted my confidence in approaching people and organisations and also helped me improve my computer skills. There is however something I did not quite enjoy doing and that is transcribing, I thought it would never end! But I do think that all experiences good and bad are beneficial in one way or another.

The office has the warmest culture and a sense of homeliness and tradition. We all share our lunch and because there are women from different countries like India, Pakistan, Lebanon, Turkey and Horn of Africa, the food is very assorted and tastes fantastic. So far so good, I am looking forward to enjoying the rest of my time left at IWWCV.

### **Fiona Tischmann**

I am a social work student from RMIT doing my final year student placement at IWWCV. I have been here now for about 6 weeks and most of my time has been spent working closely with Sultan on one part of the Citizenship, Violence and Resettlement Program. Initially, in collaboration with Women's Legal Service Victoria we have been focussing on community education around Family Law and violence in the home, directed towards the Turkish-speaking communities in Victoria. Then we are taking those findings and, incorporated with a cross-cultural perspective, educating legal service providers about the most common concerns/questions faced by this community, including what barriers have been identified that affects them accessing legal assistance, and how service providers could meet those gaps. The last tier of this project will also include educating relevant non-legal service providers on Family Law, specifically the issues facing the Turkish-speaking community. Being involved in this project has been a great learning experience for me in many

– too much I feel to include here! Suffice to say that my work with a bi-lingual community worker has given me the opportunity to really value how necessary it is to be able to provide support and community education in varying community languages, not least written information as well.

Thus far, I am enjoying my placement at IWWCV. It is true collective of women, who are welcoming, caring, intelligent, beautiful and inspiring to work with. I feel that my learning process has just begun, as I will also gain useful information and insights from the staff around me as well as the work I will undertake here in general. I would like to thank IWWCV for having me as their student, and particularly Sultan, who has provided me with ongoing support, encouragement and many smiles in my time already spent at IWWCV.

### **Fairuz Zaitun Ahmad**

It has been four months since I started my research placement at IWWCV. The research project undertaken by IWWCV is very important for the Muslim women in Australia. The research will explore violence and racial attacks on Muslim women in the aftermath of September 11. I am grateful to IWWCV for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this vital research.

As a student at VUT, this experience is very valuable to me. It is huge, significant and unforgettable. It is the most interesting and important module of my course. I am very fortunate to be able to attach myself to IWWCV and be able to learn from the experts. All the staff are friendly and willing to have me on board.

Joumanah, has given me all the guidance I need on why, what, and how this research is to take place. I am pleased with the support and knowledge that has been passed on to me. The trips we took to interview Muslim women from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds was just amazing and new to me. All these special women had their "own" stories to tell, wanted to speak and they all wanted to feel safe and inclusive.

IWWCV has taught me the importance of networking and working together with the whole community, whatever level they may be at. Federal, State or grassroots, everyone is important and need to work together for anything to be achieved and achieved successfully. Joumanah also taught me the importance of working collaboratively with other community organisations and not exploiting their services but recognising them.

The greatest lesson of all for me is to realise the strength of women in Australia, Muslim and non Muslim. I witnessed this during the launch of a leadership program organised by IWWCV at the Coburg Town Hall. At the launch, women shared wonderful experiences, heart warming ones to encourage other women to succeed in life and how great their contribution can be to the community. I endeavor to be a part of these courageous women and their community.

## Journal Article

The following article by Joumanah El Matrah was published in the FECCA Journal

One does not have to spend a great deal of time with Muslim women these days to gauge the collective sense of apprehension about their lives and future in Australia. While it is not useful to explain this collective apprehension as principally a consequence of the unabating racial and religiously based crimes against Muslim women, this reality now lies at the heart of women's discourse about this nation.

September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, dramatically shifted Muslim women's understanding of their place in Australia, but it also distorted the position Muslim women occupied in the collective mindset. It is now commonly accepted that on a historical backdrop of racism and discrimination, recent history has merged a number of events to rendered life tenuous for Arab and Muslim communities: the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, arrival of the Tampa outside Australian waters, the growing controversy and unrest about the increasing number of asylum seekers off our shores and in our detention centres and media coverage of gang rapes in Sydney by a group of Muslim young men have spurred increased attacks and the further alienation of the Muslim/Arabic communities. It appears that many in Australia felt as if Muslims and Arab (the two appear synonymous in the minds of many) were invading their land, and they directed their consequent fear and rage against Muslim women. Many of us predicted that the Bali terrorist attacks and the war against Iraq would result in increased reports of racially and religiously based attacks and vilification, but in Victoria at least, significant increases were not reported. What was evident however, was a profound level of alienation and immobility that is political, psychological and physical in nature. For Muslim women particularly the last eighteen months have resulted in a mass withdrawal from society.

Alongside this dynamic, newspapers and media outlets have carried out what can only be described as a campaign of racial, religious and gender vilification. I want to focus very specifically on Muslim women because of the propensity to attack Islam by way of displaying concern for the oppression of Muslim women has become very pronounced in our media. In Australia, the situation of Muslim women has become the window dressing of victimhood, chronic disadvantage and a tell tale sign of the religious barbarity and cultural inferiority of Arabs and Muslims. Many within the Arab communities feel that media representation of Muslim and Arab communities have been overwhelmingly negative and racially provocative, and have fed directly into 'the on the street racist and xenophobic attitudes'. The ways in which media outlets and organisations such as the Australian Press Council have responded to such criticism is worthy of another paper and a Monty Pantheon Series.

It is important to note that although a number of organisations have attempted to

gather information about the nature and extent of attacks against the Arabic and Muslim communities, there are no definitive reports or registry of attacks to date. Police reports and complaints made to Equal Opportunity Commissions do not reflect the level of attacks experienced by the affected communities. In community consultations, community members have repeatedly stated that they do not report to the police or to other government bodies. Reasons for lack of reporting are many and complex, but those that seem difficult for a community organisation to navigate include the perception among community members that there is a significant deficiency of options for legal redress, a deeply felt fear and mistrust of the police force, and an increasing distrust of the Australian government. The recent war on Iraq and media representation of the divide between the western world and the Islamic world (the antagonistic and yet completely meaningless phrase 'Clash of Civilisations' and the keenness with which the Australian media and public commentators have picked up this terminology) has many estranged and fearful that they are living on the wrong side of the world in the current dichotomy. Often what is lost in the expectations that governments place on community organisations is that frequently community organisations are working directly against broader political and social movements and institutions.

Given the absence of a definitive registry of attacks against Muslim women, information collected by the IWWCV is anecdotal in nature, but is consistent with reports produced by The Equal Opportunities Commission of Victoria and the Australian Arabic Council, October 2001. The nature of these attacks against Muslim women may be summarised as follows

- **verbal harassment:** many women were verbally abused and ridiculed publicly with derogatory terms such as tea towel head, filthy Arab, freak, rag head, post box, terrorist, terrorist fucker. A worker from the IWWCV while waiting at a pedestrian crossing was yelled at by a young man whether she "wanted to have sex terrorist style", those waiting at the pedestrian crossing laughed, causing further embarrassment for the worker.
- **physical attacks:** varying in severity, and ranging from spitting in women's faces, removing women's hijab, to more violent assaults for which women required medical care. Many of the assaults were designed to humiliate women, and included acts such as urinating on them, and assaults which were highly sexualised in nature.
- **attacks against women's property:** attacks against houses (especially women living in public housing flats/units provided by the State), attacks against cars, possessions women may have been carrying. One man snatched a woman's purse from her hand, rubbed it on his groin, and returned it to her.

- **attacks against Muslim women's institutions and public gatherings:** such attacks have been aimed at public spaces in which 'Muslim/African/Arab looking' women are seen in 'groups'. Many women's groups have received death threats, threatening letters, emails and 'concerned visitors' whom women felt intimidated by.

Although, IWWCV is keen to point out that many women who were attacked were in fact not Muslim, such as Arab, Chaldean, Assyrian, African and women from the Asia South Pacific region. There is also other anecdotal information, which suggests that immigrant women in general have now become more vulnerable to racially inspired attacks. But within the communities of Muslim women, there are further constellations of disadvantage and vulnerability. In the consultations with women it appears that the following groups were particularly likely to be racially attacked and vilified, these include:

- young women (irrespective of their code of dress). Young women also reported harassment by police
- women from the Horn of Africa (especially those wearing hijab)
- women wearing the hijab and chador
- and women residing in high density low cost housing

Again overwhelmingly, the response of the affected communities has generally been one of withdrawal. Muslim women have become increasingly absent from public spaces and less likely to use public facilities (sometimes this has been on the advice of community leaders). Parents continue to intermittently keep their children from school and community organisations and women's groups periodically cease their work. Many have explained the attacks against Muslim women as being a function of their 'Islamic dress code' (a problematic definition in itself) and the unfortunate reality for women that they are safe targets for the perpetrator. These explanations are insufficient; Muslim women were targeted for much more complex reasons evolving from the traditional suffusion of misogyny and racism.

In Victoria a range of strategies have been implemented by various community organisations, the Victoria Police and the Equal Opportunity Commission, but the impact of these strategies is difficult to gauge and probably the Victoria Police and the Commission are best placed to assess whether their strategies substantially improved levels of reporting among the Arab or Muslim communities. The perspective of Islamic Women's Welfare is that both the Police and the Commission lacked sufficient resources to ensure broad and consistent application of their strategies and further, that such strategies were never intended to replace a campaign specifically designed to address this 'new environment'. There is also the added difficulty that many forms of vilification and racist attacks, do not easily sit under the powers currently exercised by

police and other statutory bodies. Even when certain forms of crimes are recognised, such as pulling of the hijab or spitting in women's faces, it is impossible to prosecute such crimes because perpetrators do not generally remain to give their victims contact details, and it is absurd to suggest women can keep their perpetrator at hand for the police when and if they arrive.

The current barriers preventing women reporting need to be addressed in meaningfully, this includes appropriate and systematic documentation of incidents and barriers to service use. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Isma Project attempts to go some way into filling in the information gap for the Muslim and Arab communities on a national level, and Victoria's State commission has done its own work in building its relationship with the affected communities. But in a sense, we are at the beginning of a process, while the community has suffered for almost two years and in some affected communities have responded apathetically to new initiatives and works. This raises an important question has arisen as to whether the full impact of racial and religious attacks is to be measured in justice/legal terms or whether health/well being measures now better reflect the real impact on the community.

As a service provider, one of the most disturbing features of the last two years has been the gendered nature of the attacks against the community. Women have been overwhelmingly targeted in the violence. History has repeatedly demonstrated that attacks against women are grossly unreported and that even when perpetrators arrive at the feet of our courts, they are rarely convicted for their crime. Add to this historical trend, existing barriers between the legal system and immigrant communities and the prognosis for Muslim women receiving justice are very poor.

The bitter irony of this current environment is that I have never heard so much spoken about the social and political vulnerability of Muslim women and yet the position of Muslim women today is characterised by a disturbing level of silence and immobility. I think to date that the disadvantage experienced by Muslim women continues to be mistakenly understood as a function of their dominant culture, as opposed to structural exclusionary practices in Australia such as racial and gender discrimination.

It is exasperating to witness the assumption among many that somehow the experience of Muslim women is separate from the rest of 'real' Australia. Just because Muslim women constitute a minority within Victoria, we should assume nor promote the notion that their experiences are somehow exclusive and lacking relevance to those outside their communities. All immigrant women's experiences do, and should affect the social and political landscape of the state. The failure to recognise this, results in strategies in which men as community leaders or law enforcement agents organise to protect women; this is a deadly and not unfamiliar cocktail for Muslim women. Instead of asking how Muslim women are to be protected, perhaps the question should be how Australia will ensure the safety of all of its citizen's and not a select few.

# Minutes of AGM 2002

Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria :

Minutes of the 2002 Annual General Meeting.

Tuesday December 10th 2002 Edinburgh Gardens Fitzroy

Attended By:

Jenny Norvick, Marcia Neave, Nilufer Yaman, Sarina Grecco, Leila Alloush, Fikriye Demirel, Rasheeda Cooper, Maryam Clarkson, Munia Mahmoud, Nilgun Olcayoz, Dakhylina Madhkul, Sultan Cinar, Nuzhat Lotia, Asha Bedar, Sameena Ali,

1. **Welcome:** Leila Alloush formally welcomed all members and guests to the AGM.
2. **Apologies:** George Lekakis, Minister Bronwyn Pike, Jenny Semple, Dalal Smiley, Inam Barakat,, Roland Jabbour, Yasser Soliman, Sheikh Fehmi, Sheilh Isse, Sheikh Jafra
3. **Confirmation of Minutes of the last AGM**
4. **Chairperson's Report:** As per written Chairperson's report in the AGM 2002
5. **Treasurer's Report:** Presented by Firkriye Demirel , as per AGM 2002 report. Moved to be accepted by Hulya Akguner and Rasheeda Cooper
6. **Appointment of Auditor:** Pobjoy, Mulhall and Associates were appointed as auditors for 2002/2003 financial year.
7. **Appointment of Public Officer:** Hulya Akguner was appointed the Public Officer
8. **Announcement of Election of Year 2003 Committee of Management:** The committee of management for the year 2003 : Leila Alloush, Fikriye Demirel, Hulya Akguner, Maryam Clarkson, Rasheeda Cooper, Inas Mussa, Dakhylina Madhkul  
Deemed Elected
9. **Coordinator's Presentation:** Joumanah El Matrah spoke about the expansion

of the IWWCV and its vision for the future.

10. **Special Guest** Rachel Berger shared her life experiences as an immigrant's child growing up in Australia
11. **Keynote Address: Marcia Neave**, Commissioner—Victorian Law Reform Commission Marcia Neave spoke about how the Australian Law has been treating women's issues as inferior . There are now changes being made to make these laws fairer to women.

Marcia also talked about the role of the Victorian Law Reform Commission , as an independent non government body that makes recommendations to affect policy changes in Australian Law. Marcia spoke about a particular project related to sexual assault on women, domestic violence and

## IWWCV Service Statistics

### Services we work with:

Afghan women's group , St. Albans  
 AMES  
 Anglican Care Plenty Vale  
 Anti Cancer council  
 Australian Arabic Council  
 Australian Lebanese Welfare Inc.  
 Australian Western Sahara Association  
 Banyule community health service  
 Box Forest Secondary College  
 Broadmeadows Police – multicultural unit  
 Brunswick Employment Agency  
 Brunswick employment project  
 Brunswick Secondary college  
 Carlton Bath  
 Carlton Local Agency Network  
 Carlton Residential Association  
 Centre for Adolescent Health  
 Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues  
 Centrelink (Shepparton)  
 Church of All Nations  
 City of Yarra Financial Services  
 Co-Care Youth Health  
 Co-Care Youth Health  
 Community Language Program(Saturday school)  
 Community Radio -3ZZZ  
 Cutting Edge Youth Services (Shepparton)  
 Darebin Youth Services  
 Deakin University: Department of Citizenship and Human Rights  
 Department of Human Services- Office of Housing  
 Department of Justice  
 Dianella community health service  
 Domestic Violence Service  
 Doutta Galla community health service  
 Ecumenical Migration Centre  
 Ethnic Council Shepparton

Family Planning service Boxhill  
 Family Resource Centre  
 FARREP  
 Fitzroy Learning Centre  
 Gilmore Girls College  
 Hanover Housing Service  
 Iraqi Kurdish group  
 Islamic Council of Victoria  
 Islamic women's group in Hoppers Crossing  
 Kealba Secondary College  
 Kildonan Family service  
 King Khalid Secondary College  
 Kingston City Council  
 LaTrobe University  
 Melbourne University  
 Mental Health Service North East  
 Metrowest Housing service  
 Moreland City Council  
 Moreland Domestic Violence Network  
 Moreland Youth Services  
 MRC – Preston  
 Multicultural Juvenile Justice Network ( North) Network  
 Murry Mallee Training in Swan Hill  
 National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters Council  
 Nersin Tafe Kangan Moreland Campus  
 NMIT Collingwood  
 NMIT Collingwood TAFE  
 Nth Richmond Community Health Centre  
 Preston MRC  
 Project Respect  
 Robinson Reserve Neighborhood house  
 Roxburgh Park Secondary College  
 Royal Women's Hospital  
 Salvation Army Social Housing Services  
 Shepparton High School  
 St.Vincent DePaul Broadmeadows  
 Strengthening Families

United Somali group  
 Upfield Secondary College  
 Upfield Secondary College  
 VICSEG  
 Victorian Arabic Social Services  
 Victorian Transcultural Psychiatry unit  
 Western Young Persons Independent Network  
 Whittlesea Information Centre  
 Women's Housing Ltd.  
 Working Women's Health  
 Yarra Community Health Centre  
 Yarra Youth Services  
 Yarra Youth Services  
 Youth Central Network  
 YWCA

### Case Work Statistics:

Casework support to women: 1380  
 Group work session to women: 74  
 Education /Training / Conference/ Presentations: 24  
 Secondary Consultations:

**Ethnic/ Cultural Background:** Horn of Africa, Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish  
**Languages:** Turkish , Arabic, Somali and English

### Reference Groups and Committees:

- Victorian Women's Trust
- Ministerial Advisory Council for Diversity (DHS)
- Human Rights Alliance of Australia
- Centre for Civilization Dialogue and Global Governance
- Isma—Listen: National consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians
- Reichstein Foundation— Sexual Offences Project Meeting

# Auditors Report

# Audited Financial Statement

Audited Financial Statement

AN ORGANISATION  
ESTABLISHED *by* MUSLIM WOMEN  
*for* MUSLIM WOMEN