

# Islamic Womens Welfare Council of Victoria, Inc.

## Annual Report, 2001



An organisation established and managed by women for women

# Contents

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Acknowledgements	1	Annual Community Lunch	12
Chairpersons Report	2	Serene Teffaha Speech on Volunteering	
Organizational Objectives	3	IWWCV with EMC Grand Opening	15
Mission Statement	4	Annual General Meeting Minutes 2000	16
Worker's Report	5	Last Say	20
Poverty Paper	9	Financial Report	

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## Organizational Profile

### Committee of Management

Leila Alloush	Chairperson
Tasneem Moosajee	Vice Chairperson
Rasheeda Cooper	Secretary
Fikriye Demirel	Treasurer
Maryam Dodds	Member
Munira Mahmoud	Member
Amuna Abdella	Member

### Staff

Joumanah El Matrah
Senior Community Settlement Services Worker
Fatima Tawfek
Senior Community Settlement Services Worker

### Student on Placement

Christina Dawson

### Volunteers

Gulan Shaw  
Rima Taha

## Acknowledgements

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural  
Affairs

Ecumenical Migration Centre

Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre

Fitzroy and Carlton Community Cooperative



# Chairpersons Report

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**Leila Alloush**  
**IWWCV Chairperson**

Assalamu Alaikum,  
It is with pride that I present the Annual Report of the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria for the year of 2000/2001.

This passing year has proved to be complex and dynamic for IWWCV as an organization. We have continued to provide our regular services and activities for Muslim women throughout Victoria. Our relationship with Muslim women has moved from strength to strength. Committee of Management and staff have continued to work together to develop the service and implement new strategies to address issues undermining the well being of women. We have also continued to build networks and partnerships with other service providers and government. Our achievements in this regard have been considerable, and have formed the foundation for new Community Settlement grant awarded to IWWCV by Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. For the first time in its history, IWWCV has received sufficient funds to employ two full time workers.

IWWCV moved offices with Ecumenical Migration Centre, and we are now collocated with Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre. This has been a wonderful move for us.

Finally, I would like to comment on the impact of September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack in America. It was a horrifying event and our sympathy for all those affected is deep felt. The repercussions have been complex and felt by people across the world, including the Muslim community in Victoria. Many Muslim women have experienced acts of racialised violence, and religious vilification. IWWCV has supported and advocated on

behalf of the affected women, but we have also been deeply affected by this event. It is essential that Muslim women's networks and organizations be the leaders of initiatives and programs to address their experience of racial and religious intolerance. It is important to acknowledge that Muslim women have been strong and resilient in this current climate, and this has been invaluable to us as an organization and has engendered within a determination to remain persistent in our role as advocates.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging the continuous support of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, and again a special thanks for the support of EMC, which has been crucial for our organization.

Most importantly, thank you to all our staff, committee of management, member and supporters of IWWCV and the community.

I look forward to the coming year, and hope it is a peaceful for all Victorians.

Leila Alloush  
Chairperson



AGM 2000

# Organisation Objectives

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- To identify the needs of Muslim Women in Victoria.
- To develop and deliver programs and services to meet the needs of Muslim Women in a way that is consistent with Islamic values and community needs
- To represent and advocate on behalf of Muslim women in respect to the provision of social welfare services.
- To provide where appropriate, counselling, information, and referral services to Muslim Women.
- To promote social justice and equity in the provision of services to Muslim Women
- To increase Muslim Women's independence and self-worth.
- To empower Muslim Women and increase their participation in the decision making process, at community and governmental level.
- To facilitate establishment of self-help groups for Muslim women.
- To co-operate with other women's organizations to achieve better outcomes for Muslim women, in terms of service provision.
- To liaise with appropriate community groups and service organizations, for optimal utilisation of available resources.
- To receive and utilise funds and resources to improve the prospects of successful settlement and integration of Muslim women into Australian Society.
- To manage and monitor funded programs, so that funding and accountability requirements are fully met.



Annual Community Lunch 2001  
Rasheeda Cooper and Yusef Eades

# Mission Statement

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The Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria will promote and reflect the needs of Muslim women in Victoria who represent diverse Linguistic, national and individual backgrounds.

The Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria (I.W.W.C.V) was formed as a response to the perceived need for a housing and domestic violence services to target Muslim women. The first meeting was held in August 1991, and was attended by Muslim women across the communities and the welfare sector.

Since then the membership and the work of the organization has substantially increased. The work on IWWCV has been well recognised by the service system and the community, and has attracted different sources of funding. Currently, the Council is in receipt of two grants from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

Islamic Women's Welfare Council is a community based welfare organization.

## Key Service Areas:

- Casework, Counselling and Support
- Education and Training
- Secondary Consultation

## Key Community Development Initiatives:

- leadership development for Muslim Women.
- domestic violence community education and structural advocacy.
- cultural change school based programs
- media campaign for Muslim women
- racial and religious vilification education campaign



# Workers Report

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In the preceding year, Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria has continued to develop and consolidate its 1999 and 2000 initiatives. As the two part time workers of IWWCV, we have remained committed to working on areas necessary for the improvement of the status of Muslim women in Victoria. Crucial to all the work undertaken by IWWCV, is its partnerships with other organizations and the working relationships we have with other Muslim women working in the welfare and health sectors.

**Joumanah Elmatrah**  
**Senior Community Settlement Services Worker**

## **Casework**

During the year we have continued to provide support to women and their children experiencing difficulties in their settlement in Victoria.

Request for services continues to exceed our resources to respond. We had 2403 face to face and telephone contacts, some of which were referred to other services.

High percentage of services users are women from the horn of Africa and the Middle East. Key issues impacting on the lives of these women are: violence, homelessness, limited access to information and services, poor physical, emotional and mental health, and education. All of these issues combine to make the settlement process for Muslim women exceedingly difficult.

Our casework experience demonstrates the profound structural barriers Muslim women continue to experience.

## **RESOURCING OTHER AGENCIES: CONSULTATION AND TRAINING**

A significant proportion of work for IWWCV is to provide support to generic

services working with Muslim women.

Secondary consultation and cross-cultural training have featured significantly in our service provision. We have provided 67 direct and indirect casework consultation to organizations working with Muslim communities.

Six training sessions and two seminars were provided to organizations within the education, health and welfare sector. Sessions were provided to inform on issues of migration and settlement, working with diversity and diverse communities, and developing policy and good practice.

## **DEVELOPMENTAL WORK ON ISSUES AFFECTING MUSLIM WOMEN**

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Supporting Muslim women who are victims of domestic and other form of violence is the primary concern of IWWCV. In addition to casework, counselling and support to individual women, IWWCV has undertaken other structural advocacy work. This includes on going work with the Magistrates Courts, Family Law Courts and the Law Reform Commission. The development of the work plan for our newly acquired DIMA funded position resides in the key concerns identified by women experiencing violence while having to remain effective and independent carers as single mothers.

### **LEADERSHIP**

In total, fifteen group sessions and individual seminars have been facilitated to explore and build upon the leadership skills of Muslim women. This has resulted in the development of two independent non-incorporated groups designed to advocate on the behalf of Muslim women.

# Workers Report

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In essence, all the work undertaken with Muslim women can be summarised as work concerned with the developing sense of ethnic and religious identity in the face of migration and the immense diversity of Muslim women. Articulating and voicing this diversity and the 'right to diversity' has remained a powerful theme among the women we have worked with.

One of the key projects to develop from our leadership work is The Muslim Women's Diversity and Choices Project. This project is an education and Media Campaign spearheaded by Muslim women in partnership with the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria. The project seeks to address and combat various forms of racial and religious vilification.

## **REPRESENTATION ON COMMITTEES AND REFERENCE GROUPS:**

We participated in the following committees and reference groups, providing input on behalf of Muslim women.

- ❖ Working Women's Centre: group established to develop a centre for disadvantaged women attempting to access employment.
- ❖ Grandmothering Project Reference Group: project exploring impact of childcare on Muslim and non Muslim grandmothers
- ❖ Footscray Youth Housing Consultant to committee of Management.
- ❖ Working Women' Health and FAR-REP Positive Sexuality Project: Reference group designed to develop education manual on sexual health of women.
- ❖ Family Court: Consultation: on addressing and integrating the needs of communities from a non-English speaking background.
- ❖ Law Reform Commission Reference Group: Reviewing the impact on current sexual Assault laws on Muslim women.
- ❖ Diversity Victoria: Development of campaign against racial and religious vilification.
- ❖ Statewide Meeting of Arabic and Muslim Communities and Equal Opportunity Commission and government departments in response to the racial and religious vilification and acts of violence against the Muslim and Arabic Communities in Victoria.

## **MEETING WITH GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS**

- Office for Women's Policy: To advocate on behalf of Muslim women on issues of violence
- Department of Justice: To advocate on behalf of Muslim women in relation to the aftermath of September 11th terrorist act in America.
- Victorian Multicultural Commission: To advocate on behalf of Muslim women following 11th September terrorist attack on America.
- Meeting with Premier: Teamed up with other community organizations to advocate on behalf of Muslim communities following extended period of racial and religious violence against Arabic and Muslim communities.

# Workers Report

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## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

We have presented a number of conference papers this year, some of these include:

- ❖ Race and Gender Conference: Paper on the intersectionality of racism, sexism, Islamophobia and the silencing of Muslim women.
- ❖ VCOSS Conference: Paper on Poverty and Muslim women in Victoria
- ❖ Working Women's Health, Journeying Through Conference: Paper on history of Islam and its relationship to community leadership

Islamic Women's Welfare Council has also resourced and supported the other Muslim women to present their work at national and international Conferences. This is part of our leadership work.

**Fatima Tawfek**  
**Senior Community Settlement**  
**Services Worker**

### Media program

The past year saw the publication of three issues of Voice newsletter

Response to each of these issues has been very encouraging and that lead us to expand our mailing list and invite subscriptions.

Each Voice issue includes a "what's on" for Muslim women section, Readers' letters, News and Views, topical articles in English and sometimes community languages, as well editorials about recurring issues presenting to our service.

We have chosen to pursue an education theme with two editorials on

1. "Newly arrived young Muslim

women and Education"

2. "knowledge and the responsibility of the community as a whole for individual youth problems".

The latest issue enabled a Muslim woman to present her perspective on private violence to readers, it gave a voice to newly arrived Muslim youth in Cobram and Shepparton by publishing their letters and included a report on Research undertaken by Vicki Tsianakas on Muslim Women's Health.

Items published in Voice are chosen to promote a "**you can do it too**" attitude in the reader. For instance, as service providers, women and schools with large concentrations of Muslim students read and reflect on, perhaps, the recreational program, which took place in a certain locality, they begin to share our vision for developing culturally sensitive recreational outlets for the young Muslim girls in their municipality.

I chose to share some of the content of Voice with you to indicate the potential of this newsletter. Obviously, it is proving to have endless potential not only as a way of establishing and maintaining a dialogue between our service, our client groups and those who impact on their life, but also communicating models of programs and/or activities which can be adapted across the state.

Voice is now published 3 times per year, January, May and September. The January issue is to have a youth focus and we have already engaged a group of young Muslim women from Box Forest Secondary College in Glenroy to produce a youth lift out.

### Schools

Great progress has taken place towards the goal of "culture change" within schools with high concentrations of Muslim girls (as well as other schools that

# Workers Report

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need understanding of Islamic culture and practices).

We have continued to explore ways of engaging students, parents and staff in activities, which promote understanding of the cultural sensitivities of Muslim students and pave the way for tailoring educational, health and recreational programs to identified needs.

Two aspects of our work, which excited the students we met, were the Voice newsletter and the Radio program. Young women at various schools have already been engaged in this process.

In the past year we have:

- Met with Welfare and multicultural staff of various schools
- Conducted "brainstorm" exercises and information sessions with several students from year 9 to 11.
- Identified suitable sporting and recreational activities as an immediate need to be addressed

We have also opened communication channels between us and the newly arrived Young Muslim students of Cobram and Shepparton through a school youth worker and our Voice newsletter.

It is about time our learning and teaching institutions made available to all school students specific programs to impart knowledge about Muslim women in a way that eradicates persisting negative stereotypes which stifle the freedom and progress of Muslim women and young girls and prevents them from realising their academic potential.

## **Work with other educational institutions**

We have assisted Collingwood TAFE in organising a Youth Week Celebration for newly arrived refugee young people and

members of their communities.

In conjunction with NMIT we have also conducted the remaining two educational information sessions highlighting the various educational pathways open for newly arrived students in Victoria.

## **IWWCV: Impact of September 11th.**

The impact on Muslim women following the attacks in New York and on the Pentagon cannot be underestimated or omitted from this report. Never before has the IWWCV role been so pivotal as it has proved to be following events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

The past year has ended with a hectic 2-3 weeks of tailoring strategies addressing the urgent needs of Muslim women and youth who have been most affected by the racially inspired violence.

The changing nature of the Victorian community following September 11<sup>th</sup> can only highlight the volume and scope of work still ahead of us. It is essential Muslim women, particularly those currently working within the welfare and community sectors, spearhead much of the work in this area. IWWCV has worked alongside many other organizations in advocating for and then assisting in the establishment of a community support line, and we have also participated in the planning of future work.

The fact remains however, that much of the vilification and violence against Muslim women has been inspired not only by recent events but also by a deep felt ambivalence within the community about Muslim women.

We have seen Muslim women remain strong, proud and resilient in the face of recent events, and this has kept us equally strong and determined in our advocacy.

# Workers Report

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## WOMEN AND POVERTY: VCOSS CONFERENCE

### *Single Mothers, Islam & Poverty In Australia*

**Sometimes a woman may prefer hunger, may prefer destitution and may prefer homelessness to living with her husband. But even in that case she will find all the doors to divorce securely locked to her.**

Nawal El Saadawi,  
Hidden Face of Eve, 1980

In this instance, Sadaawi is referring to women living in Egypt, a country many describe as economically 'third world'. This situation seems to me not unlike that faced by many Muslim women in Australia today.

I want to begin by giving you a brief statistical overview of the Muslim communities in Victoria. There are approximately one hundred and forty thousand Muslims living in this state. Generally we say that half of this population is women.

Our communities are highly diverse, drawing from sixty-seven nationalities and therefore, many more languages and even more cultures. The intersectionality of these categories will of course identify many more groupings. Putting aside these diversities, data from Australian Bureau of Statistics suggests the following for Muslim women:

- 73% are not employed in any income operating capacity
- 59% are living on \$200 or less per week
- 37% have left school before the age of fourteen
- 25% report that they cannot speak

English well or at all

The above indicate a highly disadvantaged group that has very little access to the rights and entitlements that we as a 'just' society say we deliver. A reasonable income, a reasonable job and a level of education that makes it possible to access services at a time of need are not the basics that many of these women know. It is not surprising then that when we look to see what type of services Muslim women access, we find that they are highly represented as users of crisis services. I will refer to some of the reasons for this a little later.

So this is the statistical picture for the communities of Muslim women in Victoria.

In terms of single parenting, the experience of IWWCV suggests that Muslim women are unlikely to become single mothers without in the first instance being married, and then having to undergo the state and religiously sanctioned ritual of divorce.

To end a marriage and to attain and then maintain custody or access to her children, a Muslim woman must make her way through both Islamic law and Australian law. Independently, each of these institutions of law imposes considerable constraints on women, and neither necessarily promote her interests (Islam in itself, is supportive of the rights of women, but different culturalised interpretations of Islam would assert that it is the interests of children that are promoted, as if it is possible to conclusively disentangle the needs of mothers and children.) Together, and they are often bought together, the partnership between these bodies of law place formidable barriers in the path of women attempting to commence a life away from a failed marriage. Irrespective of cultural heritage, it

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is hard to miss that the practice of law is sometimes the practice of some men's laws. I have seen men alternate between these systems of law to successfully hinder women's access to their children and their peace of mind.

The Australian Family law system bares no relation to the provision of Islamic law, but there are instances whereby family court decisions clearly rely on the presence of Islamic law to justify its inability to act resolutely. It is important to keep in mind the complex historical life of both these forms of law, and our unreasonable expectation that a lone woman can be expected to negotiate on behalf of herself and her children.

While women are attempting to negotiate some sort workable outcome for themselves and their children through these legal systems, their relationship with the various pockets of their community is about to be transformed - or must face some kind of transformation.

Given that Muslim families are rarely just nuclear families, but branch out to a significant and active extended family. A woman must renegotiate her relationship with a large number of people, sometimes extending up to twenty or thirty people. Sometimes those relationships are negotiable and sometimes they're not. Sometimes women have to relinquish relationships with family members just when they are in most need of them. Sometimes those relationships are terminated against the expressed wishes of the woman. Within the space of two to three months, women may move from being part of an extensive network of relationships, to being the single moderator of not only her own life but also that of her children. Imagine what the process of moving from a rich tapestry of relationships and all that is offered by such diverse and present intimacies, to the desolation of one or two relationships. Imagine moving from a network of others to the relating of one other, imagine if that one other was just your social worker who called you once a week to check you were O.K, and despite your requests, couldn't attend to you any further because they had too many other women in precisely your situation.

In my experience Muslim single mother tend to have four children or more. When this is not the case, the chance of her being a young single mother is high. In both cases the collapse of traditional forms of support and care are brutalizing for herself and her children.

So what about the material considerations upon becoming a single mother? We know that extended families have the capacity to absorb the impact of poverty; childcare is a perfect example of this. An unemployed mother of four, with no family support, has no real access to private housing. Any suggestion that she does is in my mind fanciful. Public housing and transitional properties are in chronic shortage, and if there are housing workers here today they will tell you that those looking for housing, are often sent on a merry go round of service referral. Most services will tell you that the stock of properties at the moment cannot in any meaningful way address the homelessness issues in Victoria. And I speak not only from my position at IWWCV, but also from my time in the homelessness-housing sector. In any case a woman with four children is described as a 'big family' and even less properties are available to her.

The final area of disadvantage I would like to speak about is that related to the minority status of Muslim women. In the health and community welfare sector there is much talk

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about the newly arrived, newly emerging communities in contrast to the more established communities. It is appropriate and vital to recognize the needs of those who have recently migrated to Australia and to respond to the context of their migration. But it is also important that newly arrived and the so called established communities are not defined in relation to each other because in the daily grind of service provision, these categories breakdown. Women in crisis often present as if they are in fact newly arrived. Traumatic experiences can incur profound losses, including loss of skills that may not be regained by the woman in any sort of meaningful way. Furthermore, there are issues that relate to the community, that impact on women's response to the broader Australian society. Communities that are defined as established are generally communities that have perhaps two or three generations of individuals born in this country. Length of stay in Australia, does necessarily translate to settlement, much less to a community that has an established and comfortable identity in relation to its migration and its on going presence in Australia. All of these issues affect awareness of entitlements and rights, and having the capacity to access and demand those rights. Also affected is knowledge of services and how they operate. Limited proficiency in the English language and the culture that defines service provision, and the limited awareness of mainstream services in languages/cultures other than their own often means that services provide an intangible and incomprehensible form of support. If an organization cannot provide support in a way that a client understands and can engage with, then it fails to provide any service at all. The process of providing culturally appropriate services is a difficult process and many services continue to mistakenly believe that cross cultural training will ensure appropriate service delivery, clearly it does not. Ongoing negotiated relationships with communities provide some way forward. The nature of this relationship is complicated and multifaceted but nonetheless of the essence.

I would like to conclude by pointing out to you that I have highlighted only three core issues for Muslim women when single parenthood becomes a reality. I have not spoken of the day-to-day reality of homelessness and poverty and parenting in a country that one may not feel a citizen of. I have referred more to the 'doors that are locked' to Muslim women. Nor have I addressed questions relating to equality and poverty and why certain groups continue to occupy that space below the poverty line. It is said that there is such a thing as an economic migrant. Accordingly, these migrants are migrants of choice in the sense that they do not have to leave their country; they are not facing imprisonment or death. I have always thought such a definition inhuman, because it seems to me that many of these people had two options available to them; to leave their country as soon as possible, or to watch their children develop irreversible illnesses bought on slowly but unquestionably from malnutrition. This scenario of the quiet suffering of malnutrition is the face of homelessness and poverty for women and children living in Victoria today.

JOUMANAH EL MATRAH  
VCOSS Conference

## **8.Speakers:**

# Annual Community Lunch

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The Annual Community Lunch was held at Nazar Restaurant Brunswick on August 9, 2001. It was attended and enjoyed by around 80 people. People were entertained by Rasheeda Cooper and Yusef Eades on Tabla and Sitar. Attendees also participated in a inspiring talk by Serene Teffaha, speaking about women volunteering in the community to better the lives of all. We have included her speech for your interest.

## **The Importance of Volunteering Serene Teffaha**

“Why do you find it difficult to say what your skills are?”

“If we had a name, a grouping we could put on ourselves like a lawyer”...but we can't say that...we can only say that I am volunteer and I think this is the difficulty with defining the skills of a volunteer.

## **Where do they work?**

Traditionally, volunteers have long been labelled the backbone of charitable organizations, however their work is far from restricted to charities. Volunteers work in hospitals, schools, sport, support groups, and with the advent of work experience programs, in most types of businesses.

Most committees and boards are composed of volunteers. The secretary of your son's soccer club is a volunteer; the woman who works one day a week at your daughter's school helping in the tuckshop is a volunteer; the person who makes prison visits is a volunteer; the people who lead youth groups, brownies guides and scouts are volunteers.

If you removed volunteers from the Australian scene the result would be devastating. Looking at one area alone, education, it would mean an end to extension reading and maths classes, subsidised school trips and entertainments, and extra sporting and educational equipment. Library books would be limited and tuckshops would come to a sudden end. Some schools would not have halls, while others would have reduced sporting facilities.

## **What do they do?**

What is volunteer work? It is any work that is willingly undertaken and for which no financial gain is received. Volunteering is, however, rarely the result of an altruistic impulse, the desire to give but not to receive.

Volunteering today is very much a two way affair. The organization benefits from the time and talents provided by helpers and in return the volunteers gain work experience, the opportunity to make use of existing skills, to learn new skills, to make friends, and sometimes to find a meaning in life.



# Annual Community Lunch

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## **The Central Issue**

One primary difficulty with defining voluntary work however, is the lack of formal recognition of women's unpaid work skills and women's immense involvement in volunteer work. I have chose to focus on this issue in my talk today.

In an era when skills are high on the political agenda, the focus on formal and paid sectors of training and employment means that many important skill resources in voluntary work are overlooked.

The wellbeing of a community rests on both the publicly acknowledged paid work and the unpaid work which is performed in the home and in the community. Paid work is seen as part of the economy, as a sector of gross domestic product and a major resource to be developed and valued. On the other hand unpaid work is often overlooked and always undervalued.

As the bulk of unpaid work in developed countries is housework and therefore the defacto responsibility of women, its invisibility is part of gendered value systems developed from male viewpoints. This is being slowly redressed as women in decision making and lobbying roles succeed in putting unpaid work on the political agenda.

A report entitled 'Juggling Time' estimates that approximately each hour of paid work is matched by an hour of unpaid work. The 1995 ABS survey of voluntary work in Australia provides reliable data, in the previous year, 21.3 per cent of women over the age of 15 years participated in volunteer

work through an organization, compared with 10.7 per cent of men. The rate of volunteering was higher for women.

For many women, volunteer work gains them respect and public recognition which they lacked as housewives and in low-paid work. A number of female focus group participants saw volunteer work as an escape from the tedium of the domestic sphere. For them, the fact that formal volunteer work is an extension of work traditionally done by women in the private sphere, did not diminish the feeling they were contributing something worthwhile to the community.

Clearly individual women have benefited from volunteer work. For some it has directly contributed to improved career opportunities and to achieving important positions in public life. For others it has been a flexible and purposeful option to combine with child rearing or retirement. Some women continue to see it as a socially useful alternative to paid work.

However, the collective contribution of women through this work remains largely invisible and undervalued. As it is predominantly women who are engaged in volunteer work in the com-



# Annual Community Lunch

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munity services sector, the wider questions need to be asked, and the often polarised nature of the debate unravelled. Women's volunteer work can be seen as simply an extension of women's traditional under-valued role. Yet it is, at the same time, essential work which helps build and maintain our civil society and contributes to our economic performance.

## **Recognition of Skills**

Recognition of skills gained pursuant to voluntary work will have great bearing on the future participation levels of women.

Women are likely to expect different rewards and more recognition for their contribution. For working age women their volunteer work will in conjunction with or during breaks from paid work. Younger women may increasingly look for ways in which experience gained through unpaid work can be used to facilitate entry or advancement in their paid work careers.

This has relevance for policy and programs in the area of training and employment, particularly as it relates to service industries. In particular, systems to recognise the skills gained through unpaid work become very important to women's entry and progression in education, training and employment.



## **Articulating our Skills**

A study conducted by Cox and Leonard found that women had real difficulty in articulating their strengths and competencies. This was at least in part a result of their inability to talk about themselves. While this is in part lack of self-esteem, it also reflects a social construction which allows men to promote themselves, while women are expected to be modest and await recognition.

This date back to childhood where the proscriptions that girls face are more likely to inhibit boasting and skiting as being totally unacceptable for girls. Women, therefore, are programmed not to recognise and name their skills as they are not expected to talk about them, this is a factor both in the differentiation of recognition of male and female skills and the silence on female skill areas. If women cannot talk about them, then there is no way they will be recognised.

This inability of women to self promote is a major contribution to the limited discourse on these areas.

## **Conclusion**

Many of us know that we have a lot to offer and we also know that volunteer work allows us to extend ourselves in ways which would otherwise not be possible. Increased confidence, self-esteem and social contacts are valued outcomes of such involvement. However in order to reap the most benefit we need to start naming our skills so that those around us, our children, our families, our communities and our government will appropriately recognise and hopefully reward these achievements.

# IWWCV together with EMC Grand Opening Night

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The Islamic Women's Welfare Council (IWWCV) with the EMC had an opening of our new premises at 95 Brunswick Street Fitzroy on August 30, 2001. Here we have included the speech given by Leila Alloush, the Chairperson of the IWWCV.

## EMC- LAUNCH

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of this land we have been welcomed to tonight.

There is an old Middle Eastern adage, which states that groupings of people developed different languages so that they could learn each other's languages. The point of difference is not to search out points of similarity, as important as this is, but to share and celebrate our differences. This has always been an unquestioned virtue of being in Australia.

The community and welfare system exists by virtue of societal inequalities, this is an uncontested fact. Increasingly how-



ever, the demands placed on community organizations have become increasingly complex, and in some cases, organizations bound by locality have nonetheless carried some of the impact of global events. The process of engendering community change is arduous, even on a small scale. The only way forward that we can see as an organization, is cooperative and complimentary movements. To work together with those affected by injustice and inspired by difference, cannot but lead to positive change.

Being welcomed onto this land and the sharing of it with EMC, the Brotherhood and RILC is a coming together of this ideal. We are an organization, which has come to life in the space of a great deal of cultural diversity, and we are excited by the day-to-day potential of working with such diverse organizations.

The meanings of collaboration will develop and change with time, but it is a process that we look forward to.



# Annual General Meeting 2000

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Islamic Women's Welfare Council of  
Victoria: Minutes of the  
2000 Annual General Meeting  
23 November, 2000

## Attendance

Lynda Doyle, Sergal Boga, Reshe Humen  
Jihan Neika, Zein Helm, Houdan Sheilch-  
Abdulldie, Gabby Fakhri, Theresa.Ssali, Carol  
Ransley, Debbie King, Rasheeda Cooper-  
Rhonda Gillespe, Anita Canals, Miriam  
Munoz, Nora Fernandas, Jo Grimia, Tara  
Kelly, Neyla Yilmaz, Noura Hassan,  
Soo-Lin Quek, Sarina Greco, Sadet Idrizi  
Mecca Amix, Joumanah Elmatrah, Aisha El-  
hassabdella, Samia Mahfuz, Samia  
Baho, Norheyati Zubir, Iudita Trifa, Sevinc  
Yurtsever, Tasneen Moosajee, Sharefa Keny-  
Jorge Torrico, Sukerye Guiler, Maria Papadi-  
miriou, Mehmet Idbudek, Fikriye Demirel-  
Wafa Ibrahim, Melda Aktepe, Mehmet Arpac-  
Jaya Manchikonti, Leila Alloush, Aynur  
Canbolat, May Farah, Manna Eshana, Stella  
Karioghllidil, Libby Eltrinyham, Kerry Holgate,  
Yvonne Stolik, Fatma Aldemir, Mylinh Pham-  
Rasheeda Cooper, Sanem Barkoren, Hanady  
Touchan, Brenda Leeds, Nadia  
Rasheem, Amina Maliken, M.O'Shaughnessy,  
Joumana Dennaoui, John Chali, Fayzah  
Saleh, Chime Mona Tartoussi, Shuffah  
Barnes, Ellen Elsayed, Shayie Keng, Aynur  
Koken, Linda Bussthen, Sena Yildie Alhn,  
Neslihan Genco  
Sydelle Muling, Ann Nee See, Melinda Cox-  
Mazina Moussa, Nazmeen Elsayed, Manna  
Eshanc, Selma Buyday, Maryam  
Dodds, Amina H. AbdulKadel, Halime Abdullah  
Maria Tsopanis, Guner Netintok, Monque  
Toohey, Aleidi Raouf, Esme Arslan, Aysenur  
Tunger, Amuna Abdulla, Leila Taha, Ragatte  
Toure, Meredith Igan,

## 1. Welcome

Leila Alloush, the Chairperson, formally  
welcomed all members and guests to the  
Annual General Meeting.

2. **Apologies**  
Acknowledged but not recorded
3. **Confirmation of minutes of the  
last Annual General Meeting**
4. **Chairperson's Report (as per  
Chairperson written report 2000)**
5. **Treasurer's Report**

Fikriye Demirel presented the financial  
report.

## 6. Appointment of Auditor—

Pobjoy, Mulhall and Associates were ap-  
pointed as the Auditors for 2000/2001  
financial year.

## 7. Announcement of year 2001 Committee of Management by Sarina Greco—EMC

Previous committee who hold two year  
positions were deemed re-elected, the  
new appointments for the Year 2001 are:

Amuna Abdella

Deemed elected.



AGM 2000

Ms Debbie King, Director of Office for Women's Policy;

Gave a presentation on the state governments leadership for women's strategy, and its importance for migrant women.

Rasheeda Cooper, of IWWCV spoke of Equality in Islam

Rasheeda gave a presentation on her personal view on Islam, equality allocated to women, and her personal experience of coming to be a Muslim woman.

Stella Kariosyllidis, former Mayor of Coburg on behalf of Maria Vamvakinou, launched Voice Newsletter

Please find in annual report.

#### **9.Close of the meeting:**

Official business completed, participants were invited to take refreshments

### **MESSAGE TO ISALMIC WELFARE COUNCIL OF VICTORIA**

**THURSDAY NOVEMBER 23<sup>rd</sup> 2000**

DEAR FRIENDS,

FIRST, I WOULD LIKE TO APOLOGIZE FOR NOT BEING ABLE TO PERSONALLY ATTEND THE COUNCIL'S AGM TODAY. UNFORTUNATELY AN UNEXPECTED PERSONAL MATTER HAS ARISEN WHICH WILL NOT ALLOW ME TO MAKE IT IN TIME FOR THE LAUNCH WHEN I WAS INVITED TO LAUNCH THE COUNCIL'S NEWSLETTER **VOICE**-I WAS HAPPY TO ACCEPT AND CONSIDER IT AN HONOR TO HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO SAY A FEW WORDS REGARDING THE NEWSLETTER.

FIRSTLY HOWEVER I WOULD LIKE TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE ISLAMIC WOMEN'S WELFARE COUNCIL OF VICTORIA. IT IS THE BRAINCHILD OF THOSE WOMEN WHO FOUNDED THE COUNCIL IN 1991 AND HAS GROWN OVER THE LAST 9 YEARS TO BECOME AN IMPORTANT AND HIGHLY RESPECTED ORGANIZATION SPECIALIZING IN SERVICES AND PROGRAMS FOR MUSLIM WOMEN.

IT IS CREDIT TO THE MANY WOMEN WHO GIVE THEIR TIME AND THEIR PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE TO MAKING THE ISLAMIC WOMEN'S WELFARE COUNCIL AN EFFECTIVE AND COMPETENT ORGANIZATION. MORAL FABRIC OF OUR SOCIETY. YOU MUST ALWAYS THEREFORE STAND PROUD OF YOUR INHERITANCE.

AUSTRALIA WAS BUILT BY THE EFFORTS AND SACRIFICES OF MIGRANTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD WHO NOT ONLY HELPED DEVELOP THIS COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC STRENGTH BUT ALSO THROUGH THE WEALTH OF OUR DIVERSITY HAVE DEVELOPED A NEW CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN IDENTITY- THE MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIAN. YET DESPITE THIS, THERE IS STILL TOO MUCH ABOUT OUR DIVERSITY THAT MANY OF US DO NOT UNDERSTAND. WHEN WE AS A COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION OR EVEN RACISM IT IS BECAUSE SOME OF OUR NEIGHBORS DO NOT UNDERSTAND OUR WAYS OR OUR BELIEFS. OFTEN IT IS THE NEWER MIGRANTS TO THIS COUNTRY WHO EXPERIENCE THE MOST DIFFICULTIES AND AT TIMES MUST ENDURE THE PREJUDICES OF THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO REJECT RATHER THAN TO UNDERSTAND AND EMBRACE.

THE MORE ESTABLISHED MIGRANT COMMUNITIES HAVE IN THEIR EARLY YEARS OF SETTLEMENT ALSO ENDURED SIMILAR PROBLEMS. I CAN REMEMBER GROWING UP IN THE SIXTIES IN MELBOURNE AND AS A CHILD OF MIGRANT PARENTS I ALSO EXPERIENCED MANY DIFFICULTIES. THE CONCEPT OF MULTICULTURALISM IN THOSE YEARS DID NOT EVEN EXIST.

LOOKING BACK NOW I CAN ONLY SAY THAT I WAS LUCKY THAT MY PARENTS INSISTED THAT I LEARN TO SPEAK, READ AND WRITE GREEK, I WAS LUCKY THAT MY OWN MOTHER BROUGHT MY SISTER AND I UP IN THE TRADITIONS OF GREEK CULTURE AND IN THE BELIEFS OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX FAITH. IT WAS IMPORTANT TO OUR PARENTS THAT THEIR CHILDREN MAINTAINED AN ACTIVE CULTURAL INHERITANCE EVEN IN THE FACE OF PRESSURE AT THE TIME TO ASSIMILATE.

IN THE TIME HOWEVER GOVERNMENTS BEGAN TO EMBRACE THE CONCEPT OF MULTICULTURALISM AND WHEN IN THE EARLY SEVENTIES MIGRANTS AND THEIR RIGHTS WERE PUT ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA MULTICULTURALISM WAS BORN. ATTITUDES BEGAN TO CHANGE AS AUSTRALIANS BEGAN TO DEVELOP A NEW SENSE OF PRIDE IN THEIR CULTURAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY.

THE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN AUSTRALIA TODAY FACE SIMILAR CHALLENGES TO THOSE FACED BY MY FAMILY AND THE MANY OTHER MILLIONS OF EARLY MIGRANTS. MUSLIM WOMEN IN PARTICULAR MUST TAKE ON THE CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY. IN PARTICULAR BECAUSE THEIR ROLE AND THEIR BELIEFS ARE NOT OFTEN UNDERSTOOD BY THE BROADER COMMUNITY. THIS IS WHY ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE ISLAMIC WOMENS WELFARE COUNCIL HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE RECOGNIZED BY ALL AS WOMEN WHO

I AM CERTAIN THAT THIS VERY INFORMATIVE NEWSLETTER WILL BECOME A VITAL LINK FOR ALL MUSLIM WOMEN. BECAUSE ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPONS AGAINST PREJUDICE AND RACISM IS KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION. EQUALLY ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO EMPOWER MUSLIM WOMEN IS TO MAKE THEM MORE AWARE OF THEIR RIGHTS AND ALSO THE MANY SERVICES THAT ARE AVAILABLE IN ORDER TO ASSIST WITH SETTLEMENT AND OTHER ISSUES.

I AM CERTAIN THAT THIS NEWSLETTER WILL, LIKE THE COUNCIL HAS OVER THE LAST 9 YEARS GROW TO BECOME A VERY IMPORTANT SOURCE OF DISSEMINATING INFORMATION TO MUSLIM WOMEN THROUGHOUT VICTORIA.

I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE ISLAMIC WOMEN'S WELFARE COUNCIL IN MY FUTURE ROLE AS A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT. IN PARTICULAR I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH LEILA IN PARTICULAR FOR OPENING THE DOORS TO YOUR COMMUNITY. I LOOK FORWARD TO HER HELPING ME FORGE EVEN MORE FRIENDSHIPS OF YOUR COMMUNITY.

I BELIEVE THAT WHEN WOMEN WORK TOGETHER THEY CAN OVERCOME MANY OBSTACLES. IT IS BECAUSE OF OUR NATURE THAT WE ARE BETTER ABLE TO DEAL WITH PREJUDICES AND CONFLICT. ULTIMATELY IT IS WOMEN WHO HAVE THE ABILITY TO SHAPE AND CHANGE ATTITUDES AND I KNOW THAT THE ISLAMIC WOMEN'S COUNCIL WILL CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT MUSLIM WOMEN AS THEY NAVIGATE THEIR LIVES AND THOSE OF THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH THE COMPLEXITIES OF MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA.

ONCE AGAIN I AM SORRY TO HAVE MISSED THIS SPECIAL OCCASION BUT I HOPE THAT I WILL AGAIN BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE.

MARIA VAMVKINOU

## **Final Say: Christina Dawson**

As a Social Work student from RMIT, a proportion of my training is spent working in the Welfare sector. This year I have spent eighteen weeks working under the supervision of Joumanah El Matrah, with added assistance from Fatima Tewfek. This time spent at IWWCV has been the most informative and inspirational semester of my university career. I am constantly amazed by the diversity and strength of the community I work for. I have met some of the most compassionate, motivated women. It has truly been a joy working for you.

### Casework

The majority of my time at IWWCV has been spent on casework. I have worked extensively with twelve different families to address many different issues of hard ship they face. This has been predominantly issues of insecure housing. Through this work, I have been informed that there is currently a higher than usual demand for transitional and crisis housing. This in turn has placed added pressure onto public housing, resulting in an overall housing shortage. This has effected many women in the community in a huge way. Many women are staying in severely overcrowded homes with generous friends or relatives. Others are constantly moving from one rooming house to another, waiting for more stable accommodation to be found.

A huge issue for some women has come about due to changes at the beginning of the year, in regards to Social Security payments for people moving to Australia from New Zealand. Individuals are no longer entitled to pensions or allowances for two years after they arrive in Australia from New Zealand. This has resulted in many Women being reliant on the generosity of friends and family, to feed them selves and their children. It appears as though no provisions have been made in the Welfare sector to cater for these people, leaving them in poverty and a huge wait for stability.

### St. Vincent De Paul

#### Floating Properties Nomination Trial

In order to make their Transitional Housing nomination process more efficient, St. Vincent De Paul started a working group and subsequent trial. Due to a high need in the community for temporary housing, I participated in this working group and have since utilised the on line nomination for several women and their children. The process works very well, with a weekly e-mail informing participating agencies of the available properties. We have had one successful on-line nomination. With competition for housing being so high, this was very exciting for us.

### Agency Listing

As a component of my time here at IWWCV, I have been compiling a list of all the agencies that I have needed to contact as part of our service to clients. This list is unlike the 'community Resource Guide', as it consists of government Agencies, housing services, Domestic Violence services as well as Gender and Religious specific Agencies. This will be very useful to workers in the future with both hard copies and a database being produced.

### Intake Assessment Review

In order to reassess IWWCV's intake procedure I have collected information of several other Welfare Agencies, including Ecumenical Migration Centre, Hanover Women's Services and Migrant Resource Centre – Preston. Several different possibilities have been produced for our use. In consultation with the other IWWCV workers, we will decide which form is the most appropriate for our use.

### Administration

Assisting with different administration tasks has taught me a lot about the way in which a community-run organization operates. Also, it has given me an opportunity to review some of the literature written and other services available in the sector. Tasks have included, sorting journal articles and compiling correspondence.

