



Research



SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES IN AUSTRALIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES, PARTICULARLY YOUTH

A review of the literature



Australian Multicultural Foundation



volunteering australia

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Supporting volunteering activities in Australian Muslim communities, particularly youth

A literature review building on the findings from the National Survey of Australian Volunteers from Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds

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Cover image of Mohammad Mansoor Sarvar and Shameema Kolia at Muslim Youth Summit in Perth, May 2007. Image courtesy of Lynn Cain, Australian Multicultural Foundation.

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page

INTRODUCTION	4
▪ Definitions	
VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA	5
▪ Volunteering trends	
▪ Economic and social benefits	
KEY FINDINGS OF NATIONAL SURVEY OF AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEERS FROM CALD BACKGROUNDS	6
CULTURALLY & LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUND COMMUNITIES	7
▪ The many definitions of volunteering	
▪ Volunteering by CALD communities	
▪ Volunteers from CALD backgrounds in Australia	
▪ Recruitment of volunteers from CALD backgrounds	
▪ Reciprocal benefits between volunteers from CALD backgrounds and community	
YOUNG VOLUNTEERS IN AUSTRALIA	11
▪ Motivations for youth to volunteer	
▪ Barriers and deterrents to youth volunteering	
FAITH-BASED VOLUNTEERING	13
VOLUNTEERISM & MUSLIMS	15
▪ Volunteering in Islam	
▪ Muslims in Australia	
▪ Volunteering by Muslims overseas	
▪ Volunteering by Muslim Australians	
▪	
MUSLIM AUSTRALIAN YOUTH	20
▪ Areas of concern	
▪ Volunteering issues affecting Muslim youth	
▪ Current volunteering initiatives by Muslim Australians	
COMPARATIVE FINDINGS FROM VOLUNTEERING RESEARCH	26
CONCLUSIONS	27
REFERENCES	30

INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of studies provide evidence of the advantageous contributions made by culturally and linguistically diverse volunteers in the community. Whilst there is growing research concerning young people and volunteerism, there is little, if any, on Muslim Australians specifically. This review paper aims to explore the issues affecting Muslims as volunteers in light of the key findings of the Australian Multicultural Foundation and Volunteering Australia's 2005 National Survey of Australian Volunteers from Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds. In addition to the extensive research on volunteering, the review draws the majority of Muslim Australian-related information from the small and recent collection of reports and conferences. An extensive search and review of the literature revealed that relatively little work has been published exploring volunteering activities by Muslim Australians.

Previous and existing concepts of voluntary work in specific groups will also be explored to provide the grounds for supporting volunteering behaviours in Muslim Australian communities, particularly youth.

Definitions

An Australian definition is stipulated by Volunteering Australia (2005), the national peak body for volunteering, to differentiate voluntary activity from other forms of unpaid work.

Formal volunteering is:

'an activity which takes place through not-for-profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:

- to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer;
- of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- for no financial payment; and
- in designated volunteer positions only'

However, many studies included in this paper refer to volunteering in its informal sense; that being forms of helping that fall outside the above description. Formal volunteering may not include the many activities that Australians from culturally diverse communities are involved in. It is also useful to keep in mind that 'volunteering' is not a word or concept used in some cultures (Noble & Johnston 2001), and this will be explored further within this paper.

Following from the majority of studies and organisations centred on youth, the term *youth* in this paper will usually refer to young persons aged between 18 and 24 years of age. Describing these definitions serves to provide context, rather than to exclusively limit previous research. Given that the area of research is still a fairly new one, for the purposes of this literature review, the definitions will be held loosely to allow for the inclusion of a larger variety of texts and research papers.

VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA

Voluntary work is an important contribution to the Australian way of life. It meets the needs within the community and helps to develop and reinforce social networks and cohesion (ABS 2001a). Our rich history of volunteering therefore contributes significantly to the lives of all those involved and to the foundations of our democratic, caring and vibrant society (Noble & Johnston 2001). Voluntary participation itself is commonly regarded as important and beneficial at more than one level; the individual, the community and the state (Kerr, Savelsberg, Sparrow & Tedmanson 2001).

Volunteering is said to become increasingly important as shifts are made within government policies and society. One view is that with cutbacks and diversions in funding, there is a greater expectation of the community to contribute to its own care and wellbeing (Dimitropoulos 2001). Furthermore, volunteering is not about saving money, but the intrinsic value of the volunteer's role and benefit for the community and the individual (Cordingley 2001).

Volunteering trends

Statistics show that growth in volunteer rates when comparing 2001 to 1995 figures occurred for both sexes and across all age groups, in particular the 18 to 24 and 55 to 64-year olds (ABS 2002). And while the older-aged volunteer group contributed the most at 33%, it is still worthwhile recognising that the voluntary efforts of their younger counterparts grew from 17% to 27%. More recent figures also show that 41% of adult Australians volunteer in not-for-profit organisations, with an average of 132 hours per year (Australian Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) 2005).

Benefits to the community were the reasons acknowledged by 47% of Australian volunteers, as well as personal satisfaction (43%). The younger volunteers (18 to 24 years) in particular reported self-development incentives, seeing volunteering as a way to learn new skills and to gain work experience (ABS 2001a).

With reported declines in volunteer numbers, volunteer-involving organisations need to redefine the range of volunteer positions they offer volunteers (Cordingley 2001). It is also suggested they offer something in exchange, rather than wait for volunteers to come to them simply because they support the organisation's cause.

Economic and social benefits

Recent years have witnessed a link between social capital and volunteering, as the former attempts to capture social processes that contribute to wellbeing (Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights 2005). Levels of involvement in voluntary organisations may be seen as a measure of the way social systems can function (Cox 1997). This dynamic concept of social capital to measure social connectedness has stemmed from numerous studies, particularly those looking at the concepts of mutuality, reciprocity and trust as they provide ways of understanding social interactions and networks of association.

In addition to the social contributions to Australian society, estimates of the economic value of volunteering range between \$31 and \$42 billion per annum (VA 2005). With these overwhelming contributions, it is hardly surprising that organisations and governments invest so much in volunteering.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE 2005 NATIONAL SURVEY OF AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEERS FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

The National Survey of Australian Volunteers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Backgrounds, a nationwide project of the Australian Multicultural Foundation together with Volunteering Australia, resulted in a number of interesting and useful findings that have implications for organisations working with CALD communities. Those most relevant to the current paper's aims of exploring volunteering behaviours of Muslim Australians are summarised below. These points will serve as initial background before comparing with previous literature on voluntary work by people from CALD-backgrounds, youth, faith-based groups and Muslim communities.

Firstly, it is important to note the volunteer-involving organisations in the survey reported that 23% of their volunteers were from CALD backgrounds. More specifically, this proportion was **21%** within the **mainstream organisations**, similar to the 25% of CALD-background volunteers found in the wider population (ABS 2002).

Australian volunteers from CALD backgrounds contribute to the community both **formally (94%)** and **informally (72%)** (see 'Definitions' section). The most common involvement as formal volunteers was with nursing and retirement homes (43%), followed by schools (32%). Next, they were likely to volunteer in charitable organisations (27%), as well as sporting organisations (22%). Sixty-one percent of volunteers provided *services to the broader mainstream community*, more than the 39% who work exclusively with their *own communities*, as reported by the volunteers themselves (not the organisations) and challenging the idea that Australians from CALD backgrounds mainly volunteer within their own communities. These volunteers were mainly active in the areas of 'helping people in the community' (44%), administration and clerical work (36%), and friendship or counselling (30%).

Similar to **motivations** reported by the wider community (ABS 2001a), volunteers from CALD backgrounds also rate the *worthiness of a cause*, *helping the community* and *personal satisfaction* as the biggest reasons for volunteering, followed by *spiritual beliefs*. Newly arrived migrants (16% of respondents) listed *social contact* and *work experience* as two additional motivations.

In terms of **barriers to volunteering**, volunteers reported *time restrictions* as a main barrier, followed by *travel/distance*, and *reimbursement of expenses*. Notably, those over the age of 60 were most likely to consider knowledge of the English language an issue. The youngest group in the survey – 21 to 30 year olds – identified expenses as the main barrier. It should also be noted that the volunteers surveyed were largely from ageing community language groups, such as Polish,

Italian, Macedonian and Greek backgrounds, and that a large proportion of respondents (45%) were aged 60 years or over.

Organisations expressed the greatest barrier to recruiting CALD-background volunteers to be the volunteers' lack of proficiency with the English language. Whilst barriers for volunteers were mainly related to personal logistical and resource problems, the organisations focused on organisational resource issues.

A need was identified for further resources in volunteer-involving organisations to successfully **recruit volunteers from CALD backgrounds**, increase cross-cultural awareness and to make linkages across community groups and organisations. Hearing through word of mouth and community organisations themselves were the most important methods of finding out about voluntary work, according to the respondents.

The above findings from the National Survey of Australian Volunteers from CALD Backgrounds, hereafter abbreviated as the National CALD Volunteers Survey (Australian Multicultural Foundation & Volunteering Australia (AMF & VA) 2007), set the scene for other research relating to Muslim Australian volunteers. The aim here is not to replicate the extensive literature review that **accompanied** the Survey but to build from it and extend on areas that are most pertinent, namely volunteering in **culturally and linguistically diverse, faith-based and youth communities**.

CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE VOLUNTEERS

People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds contribute in important ways to volunteering in Australia, with research confirming that many thousands of Australians from culturally diverse backgrounds volunteer within and outside their own communities (AMF & VA 2007).

The many definitions of volunteering

Australians assume that the term 'volunteering' is widely understood (Martin 1999). As the concept is both culturally constructed and culturally specific; people from other cultures and societies may hold very different understandings. Firstly, volunteering has almost always been associated with 'white, middle-aged, middle-class women' (Volunteering England (VE) n.d.). Secondly, just the fact that volunteers have had a long history in Australia's welfare sector is a foreign concept for some (Vangelista 1999).

The social and ideological construction of the concept of volunteering in Australia assumes particular forms of community and family formation, namely Western liberal socio-political philosophy (Kerr et al. 2001). Put simply, this type of volunteering occurs within the public not the private sphere and represents freely undertaken choice, not duty nor reciprocity. However, the boundaries between the familial (private sphere) and the community and social (public spheres) are not so neatly defined in all cultures.

Carrying over the concept of 'volunteering' across all community groups has proved to be more than a simple translation. A South Australian project that looked at volunteers from culturally diverse backgrounds identified different elements in interpreting volunteering to this group of Australians (Volunteer Centre of South

Australia (VCSA) 1993). Some understood it without much difficulty because it referred to a similar concept in their countries of origin. For others, 'volunteering' meant a different thing altogether. Voluntary work could mean helping, charity work, community work and social work. Others had only experienced voluntary work during times of crises, as part of their daily work (thus, either survival or cultural duty), or governmental promotion, particularly in times of conflict. Other negative connotations include the meaning of conversion to particular religious faiths or ideologies (Martin 1999).

The National CALD Volunteers Survey also identified translation of the English word 'volunteer' as a major problem in identifying voluntary contributions by CALD communities (AMF & VA 2007). A similar instance occurred in a UK study, when it was realised that active members of refugee community organisations did not think of themselves as volunteers (Wilson & Walker 2006). Neither did they realise the extent to which they managed other volunteers. Martin's paper (1999) also demonstrated how unclear definitions meant that potential refugee clients did not initially understand the concept of volunteering or, more specifically, could not comprehend why someone would help them in this way.

It is not difficult to see the many problems that could result from a simple misunderstanding of what it means to 'volunteer'. Issues such as perceptions, role expectations, and acknowledgment are all affected. It is thus imperative that the meaning, concept and usage of the term be fully understood by potential volunteers to eliminate any misconceptions and/or preconceived ideas from past experience.

Volunteering by CALD communities

It has been previously suggested that people from ethnic minorities prefer a more informal and less bureaucratic approach to volunteering (VE n.d.). Findings from consultations with refugee community organisations (RCOs) in the UK give us an insight into how the volunteers, including asylum seekers and refugees play key roles (Wilson & Walker 2006). It was found that people volunteered not just to improve employment prospects or build skills but more importantly, to be helpful, be part of a community or keep busy.

A survey looking into the participation of black and minority ethnic people in volunteering and community activity in Northern Ireland found that volunteering was viewed specifically as an opportunity for promoting understanding, broadening minds and contributing to the wider community (Leong n.d.). Their roles were the same as volunteers from other groups, and they were more likely to be involved in more than one organisation. Not only were their activities related to the wellbeing and development of their communities, many were also involved in the wider community. The latter involvement was viewed as actively promoting integration, broadening minds and working with others with similar interests.

There was also a general feeling that volunteer-involving organisations were not reaching out to involve volunteers from these specific backgrounds. Drawbacks for these volunteers related to status, appreciation and recognition as well as resources. Aside from the general barriers to volunteering shared with the rest of the community (notably time, cost and dependant care), those specific to black and minority ethnic volunteers were identified. These could be clustered as barriers relating to the *institution* (e.g. conforming to Western standards, communication),

cultural (e.g. language, lack of cultural recognition), and *social-related* (e.g. racial prejudices).

Volunteers from CALD backgrounds in Australia

Around 43% of Australia's population is either born overseas or with at least one parent born overseas (Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (RRAC) 2005). For many Australians from CALD backgrounds, the concept of volunteering is not a foreign one. In fact, volunteering is considered an integral part of their lives, both the volunteers' own communities and in the general community (Noble & Johnston 2001). It can be said that many ethnic community activities would not exist without volunteer contributions (Dimitropoulos 2001).

This concept of community self-help is observed across ethnic-bound communities throughout Australia, including Greek (Dimitropoulos 2001) and Vietnamese people who traditionally turn to family members for assistance (Vangelista 1999). Likewise for members of the Arabic-speaking communities, assisting family, neighbours and friends 'was a given' (AMF & VA 2007). Thus, even though the actual term is not used to describe their actions, most communities that have a traditional concept of reciprocity, altruism and community or religious obligation will still understand the main idea of volunteering (Onyx & Leonard 2000).

A South Australian-based study examined Indigenous and non-English speaking background (NESB) people's experiences and attitudes to volunteering (Kerr et al. 2001). Respondents were principally involved in volunteer activity within their own cultural group, but many also indicated their voluntary work in the wider community. In addition to activity patterns demonstrated in the wider community (e.g. Mission Australia 2005; ABS 2001a, 2002), the study's findings showed an emphasis on culturally-specific education (e.g. language) and religious/cultural maintenance (e.g. cultural festivals, religious rituals). This was replicated later in another study of youth from CALD backgrounds where many volunteered in culturally specific and general organisations, such as sport and religion (Office for Volunteers (OV) 2004).

Volunteers from Indigenous and NESB communities in Kerr and colleagues' study (2001) were more likely to be older, with the presumption that younger people were busy with work and families, or were selfish. However, more accurate findings indicated that younger people had different motivations and tended to volunteer in activities different from the older cohorts. Younger people were more broadly represented in the wider community rather than their own cultural groups, and focused on acquiring skills for self-interest and/or work rather than being motivated by religion. This is consistent with ABS data that indicate similar findings with young people from the rest of the Australian community (2002).

A concern amongst CALD-background communities is the ageing volunteering population (AMF & VA 2007; Noble & Johnston 2001). The Greek community for example, is losing volunteers either through death or through a loss of transport options following a partner's death (Dimitropoulos 2001). Interestingly, this same phenomenon was found in Egypt, where despite a shared enthusiasm by youth for volunteering, the increasing institutionalisation and government control of voluntary organisations threatened the next line of volunteers to continue and sustain work (Wassef 2000).

With youth in CALD-background groups reported to be under-volunteering compared with previous times and with older members, the volunteering that is

occurring through channels that differ from those utilised by the wider community must be taken into consideration.

Recruitment of volunteers from CALD backgrounds

Methods employed to recruit new volunteers with refugee community organisations in the UK were commonly word-of-mouth, friends, family and immediate community members (Wilson & Walker 2006). This is also consistent with reports by volunteers from CALD-backgrounds in Australia (AMF & VA 2007). However, the UK project also found that because asylum seekers and refugees did not always understand the benefits of volunteering, it was difficult to recruit and retain them as volunteers.

Word-of-mouth has been found to be a useful recruitment method of volunteers from culturally diverse backgrounds, in that it draws people from similar backgrounds to the organisation's service users. The recruited volunteers were therefore more likely to have a deeper understanding of cultural preferences and sensitivities (VE n.d.).

Other suggestions made by the UK studies to increase opportunities for people from ethnic minorities to volunteer include the following:

- contact existing community groups
- analyse own assumptions regarding ethnic minorities and volunteering
- put an equal opportunity policy in place and review periodically
- ensure staff are aware of the policy to encourage positive attitudes, and
- explore the possibility of linking into informal ethnic minority networks.

Reciprocal benefits between volunteers from CALD backgrounds and community

A pertinent finding from the National Survey of Australian Volunteers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds (AMF & VA 2007) related to the positive contributions made by people from CALD backgrounds. These are similar to the findings from a Canadian study of volunteers from CALD backgrounds (Calgary Immigrant Aid Society (CIAS) 2005). The most common benefits identified by volunteer coordinators of organisations were:

- knowledge of culture (potentially useful information for organisation)
- contributing to cultural sensitivity of organisation's service provision
- connecting mainstream organisations with volunteers representing community, and
- bilingual skills.

Volunteers from CALD backgrounds are commended for their unique and important contributions (RRAC 2005). In the UK, the benefits of working with volunteers from CALD backgrounds were numerous: empowerment of individuals, skills sharing within and outside the organisation, mentoring (sharing life experiences), advocacy, creativity and anti-discriminatory practices, informing, educating, networking, uplifting community spirits, career development and identity retention (National Centre for Volunteering (NCV) 1997).

The Volunteering and Asylum Project undertaken in the UK, referred to earlier, is based on organisations successfully involving refugees and asylum seekers as volunteers (Wilson & Walker 2006). It is widely known that people in this group assist their own communities, with a multitude of benefits. Furthermore, the few that take part in more mainstream volunteering initiatives also bring advantages for themselves and the people and organisations they volunteer with.

The Canadian-based project that looked specifically at culturally diverse youth and volunteerism identified the top four ways organisations would benefit from involving culturally diverse youth volunteers (CIAS 2005):

1. improvement of organisation's and staff's cultural competence
2. increased support from diverse communities
3. enrichment of the organisation's programs, and
4. a pool of qualified candidates for future staff positions.

In turn, the many ways that culturally diverse youth could benefit from volunteering with organisations from the mainstream community included: learning more about the country (Canada), educating their own ethnic community about the organisations and services, improving employability, and feeling valued. Volunteers from CALD backgrounds themselves reported integration, employability training and wanting to feel valued as reasons for volunteering.

Barriers for young people from CALD backgrounds in this Canadian study were limitations of different sorts: the English language, knowledge of national culture and community, time, and financial resources.

YOUNG VOLUNTEERS IN AUSTRALIA

An important connection to make is the fact that youth in Muslim Australian communities are in fact young Australians. While distinguishing features from the majority of other young people will be identified, it would be inaccurate not to include key issues of volunteering youth in a discussion of Muslim youth.

As a growing and upcoming group in volunteering circles, youth volunteers have consistently reported under-representation and dissatisfaction in these positions (e.g. Auld 2004; Hage-Ali 2001; Volunteering Queensland, n.d). This reflects the broad recognition that many young people today face uncertain economic and social prospects, with competing demands between time and the need to support themselves (OV 2004).

Youth specific services and activities have traditionally involved young volunteers to make their services credible and relevant (OV 2004). In a discussion paper on youth volunteering (Quall 2001), it was argued that youth are pushed to only see the value in volunteering for the sake of their CVs, not themselves, because current contributions go largely unnoticed. While the author believes this stems from societal expectations that young people must contribute regularly and meaningfully to society for little or no rewards, this apparent lack of incentive contrasts with the latest statistics that reveal a growing number of volunteers among Australia's youth (ABS 2001a).

Numerous studies also demonstrate the advantages to both the youth volunteers and the organisations that involve them to be far-reaching and immense. Volunteering may be especially important for youth who are disadvantaged and would benefit greatly from maintaining community connectedness, confidence-building and increasing positive regard by older community members, who occasionally report suspicion and fear of youth (OV 2004).

With a more diverse range of motivations, interests and approaches than other age groups, younger volunteers are not currently recognised enough within volunteer programs (Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) n.d.). Even other organisations are expressing interest for various reasons, including 'to stay alive' and to recruit more widely. Funding bodies and young people themselves are also putting the pressure on organisations to encourage the involvement of young volunteers.

In light of this information, where exactly does volunteering fit in with the priorities of our young Australians? A National Youth Survey conducted by Mission Australia in 2005 indicated volunteer activity to be ranked fourth in the lives of young people (11- to 24-year-old Australians) after Sports, Arts/Cultural-related and Youth clubs. Their involvement as volunteers increased from 16.4% in 2004 to 21.3% a year later. Interestingly, the older cohort of 20 to 24 year-olds was more likely to volunteer (23.6%) than their younger counterparts.

The findings on volunteering youth collated here are crucial in further understanding Australian youth who also happen to be Muslim. As will be demonstrated in later discussions, many of the issues facing youth volunteers in the wider Australian community also apply to the youth in Muslim Australian communities.

Motivations for youth to volunteer

A discussion paper on young people and volunteering reported that many young people are willing to contribute through meaningful, challenging and rewarding volunteer work. More specifically, Australian youth prefer to have a variety of work tasks and commitment levels, as well as opportunities to take on responsibility (Sanderson, unpublished).

Young Australians between the ages of 18 and 24 years stated personal satisfaction (40%) and helping others or community (40%) as the biggest reasons for volunteering. Nearly 22% of young people volunteer because they want to do something worthwhile, while work experience and learning new skills are at 17% and 13% respectively (ABS 2001a).

In terms of activities of interest, young people in Australia between the ages of 15 and 24 are most likely to volunteer in fundraising compared with 4.1% in the areas of lobbying, advocacy, policy or research (Encel & Nelson 1996). Short-term volunteering projects are ideal for younger volunteers, because they only have a pocket of available time or look for developing certain skills (Cordingley 2001).

Whether or not youth volunteers decide to continue as volunteers has also been looked into (Auld 2004). Personal factors included experience for future employment, new skills, helping others and the community, enjoyment and fun. Interestingly, external influences such as encouragement of friends and family

members and feeling obligated were not important enough reasons for continuing with volunteering.

Barriers and deterrents to youth volunteering

The most predominant barrier for youth to volunteer is the lack of information. That is, young people are simply 'not asked' (Sanderson, unpublished). It is interesting to see that according to UK studies, of those people who do not volunteer, half would do so if asked (IVR n.d.).

Lack of value for the youth volunteers and their contributions, and not being heard have also been found to be two related deterrents to volunteering (VQ n.d.). Similarly, young people have reported that they are reluctant to offer their services unless they receive something in return, such as acknowledgment or accreditation (Hage-Ali 2001). As such, young people preferred to expend time and energy in paid work rather than volunteering.

Similarly in a survey of tertiary-students (Auld 2004), personal constraints were considered to be the biggest factors for youth who have never volunteered. Examples are other commitments and lack of time; both reasons uncontrollable by any organisation.

Misconceptions about volunteering, such as expectations of boring work, unreasonable amount of hours to contribute, and poor working conditions, also played a big role in deterring young people. Just as importantly, also rating highly was the fact that people didn't know how to get involved as a volunteer. These findings are confirmed by a UK study that found the following main obstacles for young people in volunteering: irrelevance, poor organisation, boring, time and cost consuming (VE n.d.).

The barriers and deterrents to volunteering reveal a great deal of misunderstanding; between the ideal versus real volunteering experience, and between the young person and the organisation. A national survey of volunteering in the UK in 1997 revealed that young people felt that volunteering needed a 'makeover', and the fact that they were keenly aware of barriers and obstacles to their involvement (Institute for Volunteering Research 1997).

The findings certainly question the responsibility of volunteer-involving organisations and influential bodies in encouraging youth to volunteer. It has been argued that the ready availability of appropriate opportunities is simply lacking (Sanderson, unpublished) and that large organisations are simply not able to change quickly enough to provide appealing voluntary work for young people (Cordingley 2001). In brief, it is apparent that improvements need to be made within the volunteering sector to further acknowledge contributions made by youth. However, the increasing number of young people choosing to volunteer competes with the idea that they are discouraged altogether. Rather, organisations and other volunteer-involving groups need to recognise the work that is already being done and offer volunteering opportunities specifically tailored for youth needs.

FAITH-BASED VOLUNTEERING

Spiritually-motivated reasons for volunteering – that is, a desire to carry out voluntary work based on religious belief or inspiration – have been identified in numerous studies on volunteers (including the National CALD Volunteers Survey, AMF & VA 2007). Much of the research pertaining to voluntary work within religious

communities refers to Christian groups and members. However, it is worth noting the practices of and attitudes towards volunteering to draw similar comparisons with Muslims and Islamic organisations, given that these faiths are two of the world's leading monotheistic religions with many followers holding strong traditions within the Australian community. All faith groups reportedly also share the same view that 'God is at work', prayers are answered and the significance of spiritual life (Lowndes & Smith 2006).

In the case of the Christian Church (and reportedly other faith communities), life is based on the idea that a lot of what the members do, they choose to do voluntarily (Reeson 2001). As a result, these groups are thought to be different from other organisations that also serve the community, in that the volunteer continues to offer compassion and service with or without a formal program. These volunteers who offer time and energy, simply put, 'do it as part of who they are' (Reeson 2001), with most members of faith communities viewing their voluntary action as doing 'God's work' (IVR n.d., Locke et al. 2003).

Within the Uniting Church, for example, there are infinite ways of volunteering (Reeson 2001). These include various board memberships, ministries advocating for children and people with disabilities, marriage education, and work with the homeless. Changes in society have consequently brought new issues and considerations to the Church policy in relation to volunteers, such as role inequities and occupational health and safety.

In a research paper on faith-based volunteering and public policy, the British Government was said to highlight the important role faith groups have in active citizenship, strengthening communities and participation in meeting public needs (Lowndes & Smith 2006).

In Australian society, the positive contribution of faith communities was examined in an extensive report supported by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and the Australian Multicultural Foundation (Cahill, Bouma, Dellal & Leahy 2004), in particular the interrelationship between faith-based groups and the construction of social capital. It was found that faith communities placed the most emphasis on the care within the philosophy of 'good works'. Thus a decline in religiosity would similarly lead to a decline in the ethic of care and long-term commitment to the disadvantaged. Volunteering was described as the self-sacrifice for the common good and acted as the basis of religious communities.

A UK-based study carried out interviews with leaders and active members of faith communities (IVR n.d., Faith Report). Similar to accounts by ethnic-community groups, the report recognised that many faith-based communities depend almost entirely upon voluntary action for survival, with large proportions of members volunteering regularly and on an even larger scale, occasionally. As such, policy makers are taking a greater interest in these groups and their services. The example in this case was the UK Government's decision to view faith communities as allies in overcoming social exclusion.

The research also found that differences in belief played no part in the kinds of voluntary action undertaken, making it possible to relate the findings across all religious denominations. The types of volunteering observed were broadly classified as the following:

- *routine activities* – regularly carried out, such as maintaining place of worship, fundraising, cultural activities;
- *welfare services* – provided within the community and sometimes to outside members, e.g. free meditation classes by Buddhist group;
- *festival-based volunteering*; and
- *responses to specific events* – quite often crises such as natural disasters.

Religious organisations only attract 18% of Australian volunteers, compared with 31% who work with sport, recreation, or hobby related groups (Encel & Nelson 1996). Nevertheless, there is still something to be learned if ‘spiritual belief’ remains a common motivation for many wanting to volunteer their efforts and time, as identified in the National CALD Volunteers Survey (AMF & VA 2007). This leads to the belief that whilst less than a fifth of volunteers are involved with religion-affiliated groups in Australia, spiritual motivation is obviously behind the efforts of many more volunteers when participating in non-religious activities.

There is also the important observation that many similarities exist between volunteers in religious communities and in groups bound by a cultural or ethnic commonality. Firstly, the desire to volunteer, in all its forms, is viewed by both communities as an inherent, and almost unspoken, quality that is expected of many of its members. Secondly on a related point, volunteering processes and practices within these groups is believed to have been more often than not less structured and informal, until recently when societal changes began to make a negative impact (e.g. Reeson 2001).

VOLUNTEERISM AND MUSLIMS

Volunteering in Islam

Volunteering is not a foreign concept in Islam. Donating to charity, helping family and assisting others less fortunate than oneself is scripted in the verses of the Holy Book, the *Quran*, as well as in the exemplification of the revered Prophet Muhammad’s teachings and life stories:

‘One who tries to help the widow and the poor is like a warrior in the way of Allah’

[Source: Bukhari’s collection of Hadith]

Duties and obligations extend past family and parents, but also to neighbours, the needy, the elderly and orphans. Moreover among the qualities and social manners encouraged in Muslims are brother/sisterhood, cooperation, tolerance, justice, hard work and firmness against odds and evil (see Sarwar 1980).

Zakat, one of the five pillars (basic duties) of Islam, is the compulsory welfare contribution Muslims give to the disadvantaged. This is in addition to voluntary donations to charity, and is a means of avoiding greed and selfishness, as well as encouraging honesty in earnings and expenditure. A real-life example is Pakistan, where \$70 million is automatically deducted each year from bank accounts as part of zakat (World Volunteer Web at <<http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/news-views/news/doc/pakistan-quake-rekindles-volunteer.html>>).

With these basic Islamic concepts, it may be said that volunteering is not only a familiar act to Muslims but that it is expected and considered compulsory (as mentioned before with community and other faith-based groups). This is especially true if one relates volunteering to the idea of charity and helping others.

Dr Ahmad Hussein Sakr (n.d.) recommends the following list of considerations for Muslim volunteers:

- No volunteer is to brag about time, effort, energy, knowledge or memory expended, when they are doing it in the way of God, or *Allah* in Arabic.
- No volunteer should accuse employees of receiving money, for the same task they are doing for free
- No volunteer should accept a job or title for the sake of showing off
- No volunteer should accept a job or title when they know they are not qualified
- No volunteer should accept a job or title, while knowing he is strapped for time

Although this is only one recommendation on Muslim volunteer behaviour and not a widely known prescribed set of guidelines as such, it stands to emphasise that volunteering is a task that is to be taken seriously and with the clearest of intentions.

Current day examples of Muslims volunteering are highlighted in recent humanitarian crises. War-weary Baghdad, Iraq has seen small acts of altruism by locals amongst the violence and sectarian hatred. Since 2003, there have been 5000 private organisations officially registered with the Iraqi government including charities and human rights groups (7000 unofficially), from homemade shelters to clothing donations to job and husband hunting (Tavernise 2006). The 2005 Pakistan earthquake also reportedly inspired a new generation of volunteers (World Volunteer Web <<http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/news-views/news/doc/pakistan-quake-rekindles-volunteer.html>>), in addition to the fact that 58% of Pakistanis volunteer their time to needy causes and that the Muslim-dominated nation has one of the highest rates of philanthropy in the world.

Muslims in Australia

Just over one quarter of a million Muslims live in Australia (ABS 2002)¹. Muslims make up the third largest religious group in Australia behind Christians and Buddhists, with a significant increase over the last decade; almost doubling between 1991 and 2001 (40%, ABS 2002).

Muslim Australians are a very young population with just under half aged 24 years and under, compared with the rest of the nation at 35%. Australian-born Muslims (over one-third of all Muslim Australians) are especially youthful, with 86% falling in the 24 years and below age bracket (ABS 2002).

Muslim Australians are also a culturally and linguistically diverse group, with less than 20% born in Middle Eastern or Arab countries, contrasting with the popular

¹ This is reportedly an underestimate considering that 15% of Australians did not report their religion in the 2001 Census

Muslim stereotype. A very important point to make here is the heterogeneity of the Muslim Australian population; Muslims in this country make up a diverse and culturally rich group of communities. Examples of countries of origin include Iran, Ghana, Vietnam, Malaysia, India and South Africa, to name a few. While it is easy to dismiss Muslims in Australia as a singular group with little variation, this impression is false. It is quickly overturned once language, level of practice of Islam, cultural tradition, socioeconomic status, and relative arrival into the country are taken into consideration. Given this, the term 'communities' rather than 'community' will be used hereafter to collectively describe Muslim Australians.

This more accurate description also stresses the fact that most Muslim Australians may be classified under the category of CALD-background, with at least two thirds of the group born outside Australia and assuming this relates to ethnic origin.

On average, Muslims are economically disadvantaged in relation to other Australians in terms of income and employment (Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 2003). This is despite a similar educational profile to other Australians and leads to questions regarding career aspirations of Muslims, recognition of qualifications, access to employment services and the perception of Muslims by the broader community.

A report entitled 'Isma – Listen: National consultations on eliminating prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians' (2003), conducted by the Human Rights Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) drew out and summarised via community consultations many of the issues that today's Muslim and Arab Australians face post-September 11. The biggest impact of prejudice found on Muslim and Arab Australians was a substantial increase in fear; namely, being worried or afraid that something bad would happen to them as a result of discrimination against their race, culture or religion.

Arab and Muslim communities have been affected by discrimination and vilification in two main ways. Firstly, some participants felt that communities have become more insular as a result of real and perceived dangers from the 'outside'. Others have felt more pronounced inter-community divisions, especially between Christian and Muslim Arab-Australian communities.

The reported negative impact on young people has been substantial, including youth themselves admitting to rebelling in response to feeling alienated and scared, especially in schools. Frustration has increased with the constant pressure to explain ethnic identities or justification of choice of dress.

Volunteering by Muslims overseas

While little was found on Muslims volunteering, there have been even fewer studies on volunteering in Muslim countries². One comprehensive study pursued the history of volunteering, profile of volunteers and cultural influences in Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine (Shteiwi, Abdelmagid & Abdul-Hadi 2004). The importance of volunteering was found to be marked by two important factors. One is the fact that volunteerism

² The definition of a 'Muslim country' here is based solely on the Muslim majority of the population

can be traced back to the 19th century in some countries of the Arab world and secondly, the cultural and religious Arab Islamic and Christian inheritance that continue to influence charitable associations to the present day.

The research also pinpointed certain characteristics of the volunteers in the three nominated countries. Despite being the largest group, youth were believed to be the least engaged in volunteer work, as indicated by the age distribution. Levels of income, social status (such as professional or student) and education were all found to be positively connected with voluntary work. This is slightly similar to recent figures in Australia where high education and high labour force status correlate with higher rates of volunteering. However, the amount of volunteering time donated in Australia is greater when the income and/or level of educational attainment are lower (FACS 2005).

While willingness and participation in social service were found to be the highest motivator for volunteers, interestingly, the motive of religion occupied last place for Palestinian volunteers compared with second and third for Egyptian and Jordanian respectively. In Palestine patriotic reasons were found to be behind many of the motivations.

Attitudes of the participants in these countries also highlight the traditional perspective of voluntary work being part of religion, customs and traditions. Finally obstacles to voluntary work often related to external factors unrelated to the potential volunteer, such as the overcrowded number of voluntary organisations, political or 'clannish' influences over them, legal and legislative problems, weak planning and organisational capacities and lack of financial resources in many organisations. The one barrier that has been highlighted in many studies in addition to this one is the non-availability of enough awareness of the concept and philosophy of voluntary work among volunteers.

Two examples of volunteer-based organisations in Muslim countries are the National Volunteer Movement in Pakistan (<http://www.nationalvolunteermovement.org/about_us/introduction.asp>) and the Association for Volunteer Services, Lebanon (<<http://www.avs.org.lb/index2.html>>). They are identical to websites of organisations from other parts of the world in that they serve to inform the viewer of the many ways one can volunteer and with whom in these countries, along with other useful, related information. Both also stress the importance and relevance of volunteering, with the National Volunteer Movement envisioning 'a nation where all citizens freely express national pride through participation in volunteer actions that uplift and build communities' and the Association for Volunteer Services reminding potential recruits that it is 'very much a part of Lebanese culture...[and providing] a mutual aid network'.

Not to be overlooked is the voluntary work contributed by Muslims in places other than Muslim countries. An illustration of the importance of volunteering is summarised on an American Muslim organisation website. The following message heads the 'Volunteers Page' in hope of recruiting many more Muslims to assist with projects within and outside Muslim groups:

Volunteering is the best way to learn, to build good relations and to bond with members of the community at large. You will, *inshallah* (God willing), get a chance to practice being a 'role model' for the youth, Muslims and non-Muslims too. This method of putting you in a position to 'teach' Islam will,

inshallah, greatly increase your own Iman (faith) and dedication to Islam.

(Source: Muslim American Society of Tampa, <<http://www.mastampa.org/volunteer/volunteer.htm>>)

Also in the United States, a group of Muslims volunteering in the mainstream community, the Virginia Muslim Coalition for Public Affairs, were actually awarded for their community spirit, hard work and faith-based initiative (www.vanaturally.com/volunteer.html). As a recipient for Friends of Chesterfield's Riverfront's 2005 Volunteer of the Year award, the group served as a positive model to others in the community through fundraisers and committing hours towards environmental efforts in Chesterfield County.

As noted before with faith-based volunteering, what is interesting to note is the effect of social change. A British not-for-profit group, Islamic Relief, recognised that many Islamic charities battled suspicions of political links to other organisations, and was set up to help Muslim aid groups around the world accomplish three main objectives: 1) become more professional, 2) more transparent financial records, and 3) build relationships with non-Islamic not-for-profit and charitable organisations (Gidley 2005). This presents an example of Muslim volunteers adapting to better meet the needs of the communities that need assistance.

Volunteering by Muslim Australians

Two separate channels of volunteering by Muslims are recognised: Muslims volunteering for Muslim organisations, and Muslims volunteering for other organisations in the wider community. The reference of Muslims volunteering herein will always assume both areas unless otherwise specified, as was similarly done in the discussion of volunteers from CALD backgrounds.

While many Muslims volunteer to some extent within their affiliated groups, whether that be mosque-associated, ethnicity-linked or related to educational groups, many Muslims have expressed the need for their peers to extend their volunteering outside their own communities (National Muslim Youth Summit (NYMS) 2005; Victorian Muslim Youth Summit (VMYS) 2006). Despite the familiar concept of volunteering, Muslims can be perceived as passive and reactive rather than proactive, in response to social issues according to an article by Cleland (2005). The author adds that volunteerism stands as one area that needs more attention from Islamic organisations in Australia with claims that perhaps in its formal sense, volunteering is not well established in the societies from which the majority of Muslim adults come from.

This is not to suggest that Muslims do not wish to volunteer but rather they do not always have the means to, as will be discussed shortly. As described in the CALD section, many of the issues that affect Australians from a CALD-background will be identical for many Muslims, simply by nature of their shared demographic. Thus it must be taken into account the limited understanding of volunteering (in its Western conceptualisation) by some Muslim communities. These issues and the perceived lack of volunteerism as a result of or response to limited understanding and recognition within Muslim communities, particularly amongst Muslim youths will be explored in further detail.

MUSLIM AUSTRALIAN YOUTH

Young Muslims in the age bracket of 25 years and under make up almost 50% of Australia's Muslims (ABS 2002). The Muslim Australian youth community is fast growing – not just in number but also in terms of community participation with at least 16 youth groups across Australia (including Cocos and Christmas islands) recognised by statewide Islamic organisations (e.g. Islamic Council of Victoria, Tasmanian Muslim Association). This number does not include the youth active in the tens of dozens of groups affiliated with universities, ethnic groups and mosques.

Muslim Australian youth have a tremendous amount to offer the Muslim communities, as well as the wider Australian community (Grassroots Youth Services (GYS) 2006). Many young Muslims are also from CALD backgrounds (ABS 2002), and as such, add to the richness and diversity of the face of Australian youth. In the recent social and political climate, young people from this group have been negatively impacted on a large scale and on many varying levels (e.g. HREOC 2003). These include discrimination, misconceptions of Islam, education, identity, career, social development, and emotional and psychological wellbeing. While, understandingly, this has posed restrictions and challenges for Muslim youth, it is also hoped that such conflicts will also serve as opportunities for many to overcome setbacks and test their strengths in achieving their maximum potential (AMF unpublished; Young Australian Muslim of the Year Award n.d.).

Recognition of these adversities has prompted action from both local communities and Government to assist Muslim youth. These have resulted in numerous responses: summits (National Muslim Youth Summit, Victorian Muslim Youth Summit), programs (e.g. Young Australian Muslim of the Year nationwide award), youth-focused centres (Grassroots Youth Services in Melbourne) and web-based youth groups (such as South Australia-based <www.youthemerged.com>).

Areas of concern

It is worthwhile noting the issues that current young Muslim Australians are concerned with.

In a recent Federal Government-supported National Muslim Youth Summit (December 2005), 66 young Muslims selected from diverse ethnic backgrounds, varying levels of practice (in other words, how 'religious' they were) and representing every Australian State and territory were asked to attend as delegates. A pre-Summit survey was sent out to gauge opinions on issues affecting young Muslim Australians. Of the 30 issues, the five most believed to be important, and therefore to be discussed at the summit, were (starting with highest voted):

1. education of Islam to wider community;
2. racial and religious discrimination;
3. media coverage of Muslims;
4. identity and integration of Muslim youth; and
5. anti-terrorism laws.

It is interesting to note that these areas of most concern to this heterogeneous group of young Australians relate to the perceptions and treatment of Muslims,

perhaps both amongst the Muslim communities and between people of Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds. From these initial responses, four major themes of discussion were elected: Identity, Community, Relationships, and lastly, Employment, education and training.

A post-Summit evaluation then asked for the reason behind the delegate's decision to attend the two-day Youth Summit whereby transport, accommodation, and catering were provided. '[Interest in] Summit themes', and 'Opportunity to give opinion on important issues' were equal in votes, followed by 'Networking opportunities'. This is not surprising considering the prior lack of opportunities for young Muslims to voice their opinions and comment on issues that affected them, in a space where they felt safe, valued and had permission to do so (Toohey M 2006, pers. comm., 15 February).

On a smaller scale, a launch for 'Grassroots' a new Muslim youth service in Melbourne, put together a broad-based community youth festival, bringing together a diverse range of Muslim youth. Primary areas of concern or interest expressed on feedback forms were:

- Women's sports activities
- Positive contact with Australia's indigenous community
- Media training
- Employment
- Mental health services
- Social justice and volunteering opportunities
- Social events (similar to the Grassroots launch)
- Interfaith social justice projects
- Access to justice (particularly legal rights and police harassment)

According to the youth workers of the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria the most common concern reported by the young Muslim women who access their services is the lack of recreation and leisure activities available. Specifically, those that are female-only and are considered 'Islamically' sensitive to allow for private space and appropriate dress code. Parental restrictions and transport are also commonly identified as barriers to access to appropriate services and activities. Other issues were cultural and religious identity, followed by body image and health (Hammoud M & Khalid J 2006, pers. comm., 17 June).

In a draft report to the Victorian Council of Churches (2006) by an Interfaith Liaison worker, young Muslim leaders especially have expressed some impatience at Muslim leadership, namely the passivity, perceived lack of imagination, and initiative of older Muslim leaders in Australia. Mosques for example, do not give enough responsibilities to young people despite the fact that leaders in the affiliated groups are genuinely puzzled as to why the youth are not present (Reid, unpublished). This echoes resoundingly the conflicting double-edged dilemma of ethnic community and certain voluntary groups as mentioned previously; leading elders are concerned about the future of their organisations while the young people are frustrated at not being given enough trust and responsibility to be active.

Finally, focus group sessions with young people in a special needs audit of the Victoria Muslim community by the Islamic Council of Victoria (Aktepe 2003)

identified mentoring, sports (for females), leadership (*imam* - Muslim leader - training), and media reporting as concerns affecting Muslim youth.

In summary, young Muslim Australians are concerned about two key areas: development of themselves as individuals (e.g. recreation, mentoring and employment), and the community (social justice, media perceptions). The issue of religious identity and preservation of both the individual and the community as a whole is obviously an important concern to these young Muslims. A strand highlighted again and again was the need for recreational activities for young women, in line with past studies that identify sport as the most popular area of volunteering for young Australians.

Further research across the nation's Muslim communities and with young Muslims from a larger variety of backgrounds would need to be formalised before confirming these findings. It is also acknowledged that the given information is limited to the opinions of participants and/or attendees of the abovementioned events, whose viewpoints are perhaps more consciously and socially influenced by the current affairs in the Muslim and wider communities than other young Muslims. It is conceivable, however, that the findings would be similar for any group of young Muslim Australians with enough desire to bring about positive changes, and therefore volunteer in some capacity.

Volunteering issues affecting Muslim youth

It is one thing to state that Muslim youth have expressed concern about certain issues. But where is the evidence that shows they actually want to do something about it? Currently, much of the voluntary work carried out by young Muslims in Australia is not formally recorded, nor has it been exclusively researched. However, anecdotal reports, community action and feedback from this group strongly indicate continuing intentions to volunteer within and outside their communities.

At the Grassroots launch festival, the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues as a stallholder on the day reported a high level of interest in signing up volunteers for their organisation. Specifically, young Muslim attendees either completed application forms or expressed interest to receive information for the Youth Participation Register (skill and professional development and networking), Young Leaders of Today program, Multicultural Youth Mentoring Project and the Youth Reference Committee amongst other CMYI program activities (Grassroots Youth Services 2006).

As one of the major themes in the Victorian Muslim Youth Summit, 'Volunteering' invited much discussion amongst feedback groups. The questions and the consequent discussion points are listed below:

What do young Muslims currently want to volunteer in? Events that are out of school, activities from their own affiliated organisations (therefore, highlighting an effort needed to further encourage youth to volunteer services beyond their familiar groups), and groups relating to aspects of self such as culture, refugee status, and language.

What are the main motivations to volunteer? Main incentives reported were to contribute something, to perform as part of own religious obligations, to promote social justice causes, and personal satisfaction. Motivations relating to

future career or employment prospects – significant factors in many youth volunteering studies – were not mentioned. However education of benefits was listed as a solution later on.

What are the main barriers to volunteering? When asked what obstacles stood between young Muslims and volunteering, delegates listed the following as some of them: isolation (culturally, geographically, linguistically), cultural stigma attached to being a volunteer, lack of appreciation, and time constraints. Volunteers also felt that they were consistently taken advantage of by some Muslim organisations leading to ‘burn out’ of individuals. Negative repercussions of volunteering were also mentioned and referred to a number of things. One is the overprotective response by parents who feared for the safety of their children, daughters especially, when extending help outside the close family and friends’ circle. Others include the concerns by other community members of young people volunteering in the greater community, again due to ‘fear of the unknown’. In this case, internal community help was felt to be associated with less risk and exposure of harm to the young person.

How can young Muslims be encouraged to get involved in volunteering? Participants suggested the provision of resources of information and points of access to be put in place to guide potential volunteers. A greater exchange of information between Muslim and non-Muslim organisations is also necessary, so that, firstly, volunteer-involving organisations are able to share ideas, and, secondly, young people are more aware of organisations that exist in the communities. Awareness about volunteering also needs to be raised with the rest of the community. Just as it was pointed out for other young Australians, Muslim youth need to be reminded of the benefits of volunteering, including the gain of work and interest-related skills.

As an additional point, one of the organisers of Grassroots reported the ease of recruiting young Muslims as volunteers to assist in the days up to and including the event itself (Rahman A 2006, pers. comm., 17 June). This was mainly because many had been involved, and were therefore familiar, with other recent Muslim youth events prior to this one. The message was spread mainly via word-of-mouth. The organiser also pointed out that the endorsement by a reputable Muslim organisation (in this case the Islamic Council of Victoria), and being a one-off special event promising to be different from others (attracting the potential recruit to be part of a unique and exciting project), were probably two major incentives to participate as a volunteer.

What are the current problems that exist for Muslims who volunteer or want to volunteer? Two main areas were thought to persist as problems hindering Muslims to volunteer in general as perceived by these Muslim youth. Firstly were the young person’s own demands and needs. *Personal concerns* compete with involvement as a volunteer, especially without the positive reinforcement and acknowledgement needed to make the young Muslim feel valued. This point has been shown in study after study of young volunteers (e.g. Hage-Ali 2001) and Muslim Australian youth are obviously no exception. The perception of limited options with whom to volunteer is also related to this issue. On one hand there is insufficient awareness within communities of the volunteering opportunities available, and this is the fault to some extent of community leaders and groups and the organisations themselves. Whilst on the other hand, the few opportunities that

the young person may know of are not attractive enough to be worthy of their time and efforts.

This leads to challenging the *organisational culture* of many of the groups within Muslim communities, that is, the collective attitudes and practices within the organisations. As expressed in the feedback reports, there is the recognition amongst Muslim youth of the competitiveness of certain organisations, in that each strives to do its best to serve the community but sometimes with little or no constructive interactions with each other. The young people report having to stay 'loyal'; one way this may be presented is restricting oneself to working with the one voluntary organisation and not another, despite the fact that the second organisation may have similar objectives and activities. There are a few reasons for this 'intergroup rivalry', including conflicting leadership, differing religious ideals (for example, one may pride itself as being more religious than another), or historical family ties.

What are some of the solutions to these problems? Many suggestions were put forward to counter some of the barriers and problems to young Muslims volunteering:

- stressing Islamic importance and significance of helping others,
- education to youth about the benefits of volunteering,
- more open and positive understanding amongst community members (therefore targeting parental concerns and competition between various Muslim organisations),
- partnerships of Muslim groups with non-Muslim groups,
- information groups and forums set up specifically to assist Muslim volunteers, and lastly,
- setting up of a Muslim-specific volunteer database, and links to be made with other existing databases in wider community.

Some of these solutions are already in practice, such as the link with mainstream organisations; in late 2005 the Islamic banking institution Muslim Community Cooperative of Australia organised a blood donation drive amongst members of the Victorian Muslim community where 400 Muslims donated blood for the Red Cross, and a similar campaign was to be held in Sydney in July 2006. A database of Muslim volunteers called Australian Muslim Volunteer Network (<www.missionofhope.org.au/amvn.php>) was set up by Sydney's Muslim welfare organisation Mission of Hope. Clearly however, these suggestions need to be explored and investigated further to put in place practical solutions to encourage volunteering with more of the Muslim youth.

The notes taken from the Victorian Muslim Youth Summit represent the first step in encouraging volunteering amongst Muslim youth. Direct consultations and informal discussions have merely opened the door and provided valuable insight into their volunteering behaviours.

In addition to the Summit notes, another source of information for the current literature search has been Australian-based Muslim chat forums (e.g. <www.islamicsydney.com>, <www.aussiemuslims.com>). As with any regular web-based forum with young adult participants, youth activities and events are often the central topics of discussion. When questions regarding volunteering and Muslim

youth were posed, feedback was overwhelmingly positive. While it is acknowledged that the following comments were from chat forum users, and therefore a specific niche of young Muslim Australians, their views are worth noting.

Reasons for volunteering both internal and external to their own communities include rewards from self and from Allah, following the examples of the Prophet, community involvement and importantly to break down barriers and stigma attached to Islam. One quoted, 'What better way to give back to the community which has provided you with opportunities?' Voluntary work with Muslim and non-Muslim organisations was regarded as equally important as each other and in contrast to the Summits' feedback, youth were reportedly encouraged by all to volunteer.

One drawback to being involved was said to be when an organisation's activities clashed with the personal and religious values of the volunteer. Another youth pointed out the fact that many volunteer groups operated under a (conflicting) religious banner posed a barrier to recruiting Muslims.

Current volunteering initiatives by Muslim Australians

At present, there are only a small number of Muslim groups who have largely publicised the need for volunteers. A recent initiative was by the Sydney-based Australian Muslim Volunteer Network (AMVN), the aims of which are to develop a professional, responsive and committed pool of volunteers to assist non-profit Muslim organisations. Registration is submitted online, making it convenient to both recruit and collect information about potential volunteers, as well as to broadcast to Muslim communities. Information requested on the form includes types of volunteering they wish to participate in, from basic life skills to Islamic lessons to environmental classes. Piloted in late 2005, AMVN is currently running a comprehensive training and professional development program for its volunteers. The list of reasons offered for the potential recruit to state which encouraged them to volunteer in the campaign were:

- participating in society development through humanitarian work,
- use my free time constructively,
- want to please Allah,
- to gain experience in a particular field,
- to join friends doing volunteer work,
- to overcome personal problems with the help of other,
- new experience, and
- to put my talents to good use.

There are public examples of Muslim Australians working to support the community. In March 2005, members of the Victorian Muslim community raised \$155,000 towards purchasing diagnostic imaging equipment for the Royal Children's Hospital. Sheik Fehmi El-Imam, leader of Preston Mosque said, 'it is our duty to help our community and this is just one instance where we can help.' [*AMF Update Magazine*, Summer 2004-05, p. 11]

There are many other voluntary contributions being made by the youth of Muslim Australian communities in all parts of the country. Some are formalised and highly publicised in Muslim communities and in the public sphere, such as the Government-supported Youth Summits, the Young Australian Muslim of the Year Award (<www.yamy.info>), and community television's 'Salam Café' program (<www.salamcafe.com.au>). Many more manifest as radio shows, activity days, charity fundraisers, sporting events, web-based groups, youth camps to name just a few, and these volunteer activities are just as important. This is particularly true since the latter are not only run by the youth but are youth-initiated.

Not all voluntary work by Muslims in the wider community is adequately captured by current research methods however, which contributes to the scarce evidence there is relating to volunteering by members of Muslim communities. It can be argued that since volunteerism is an innate behaviour to be attributed to all Muslims, voluntary activities are not specified as such by Muslims themselves. If Muslims do not differentiate volunteering from their everyday work, how can it be expected to be recognised by others? Hence much of the contributions go unnoticed.

COMPARATIVE FINDINGS FROM VOLUNTEERING RESEARCH

In summary of the research reviewed, several patterns have been found through discussions of research of volunteering work with the youth, faith-based and CALD-background communities. Conversely, there are features that are specific to Muslims, or Muslim youth, only. These similarities and differences are highlighted below.

- **Patterns of involvement**

Similar to volunteers from CALD backgrounds, young Muslim volunteers tend to contribute to more than one voluntary group. This is perhaps related to the finding that youth are more likely to be involved short-term as volunteers, and are therefore able to participate with more events if they are one-off or do not require long periods of commitment. Although Muslims currently contribute voluntary work within their own communities, many have expressed the need to encourage more to 'venture out' of their groups as many Australians of CALD background have already.

Sporting organisations did not appear to be a main activity involved by Muslims in contrast to the majority of other young Australians, the need for female-specific recreational activities was mentioned on several of the reports. Due to lack of research comparisons could not be made between volunteering patterns of older- and younger-aged volunteers in Muslim communities

- **Benefits**

Volunteers from culturally diverse backgrounds and the organisations that involve them report similar advantages to such voluntary contributions, mainly along the themes of cross-cultural awareness.

Muslims also reported how volunteering in mainstream organisations would serve to counter negative stereotypes, and this in itself was a motivation for many. This is in addition to young Muslim volunteers reporting the spiritual reward gained, namely carrying out work that is encouraged by God, for helping others.

- **Motivations**

Personal satisfaction and the promotion of positive social justice were shared values behind volunteering as expressed across all volunteer groups discussed in this review.

In contrast with other Australian youth however, young Muslims who volunteer expressed very strongly their faith-inspired motivations to contribute back to the communities.

Since much of the information regarding Muslim youth were based on young people who were already volunteering (the fact that they participated in the events and summits was evidence of this), it would be interesting to find out what would motivate young Muslims who do *not yet* contribute any voluntary work.

- **Barriers**

Cultural and linguistic barriers were consistent findings with Muslim volunteers and volunteers from culturally diverse backgrounds, in addition to the usual cost constraints of being a young person. This includes negative perceptions within (such as inter-organisational conflict) and outside Muslim communities. A common issue in endorsing volunteering across many of the groups researched was the lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities. Even the concept of volunteering itself was not always explicit across varying groups. There were differences between organisations and the volunteers-to-be, as well as between differing cultural groups etc.

Shared with the rest of Australian youth, is the concern by young Muslims that the work they do as volunteers is not fully appreciated or even recognised, both by the organisations themselves and the wider community. A greater focus on acknowledging voluntary work by individuals, would instill self-worth and value into their contributions therefore encouraging the youth to volunteer further. Again, more research is needed from the non-volunteering Muslim perspective.

- **Retention and recruitment**

Organisations working with volunteers from CALD backgrounds and Muslim youth expressed the need for further resources to increase cross-cultural awareness between groups and organisations studies, including inter-organisational communication within Muslim communities themselves. It was also shown that education about volunteering in an Australian context was clearly necessary for volunteer-involving groups, would-be-volunteers and the community as a whole. Word of mouth through family, friends and acquaintances was found to be the most effective way of recruiting volunteers in more than one study on volunteers from CALD backgrounds. However, no research has yet to be found on the methods of recruitment or retention of Muslim volunteers. Anecdotal evidence provided by groups such as Grassroots does, however, indicate the effectiveness of word-of-mouth recruitment.

CONCLUSIONS

The current literature review aimed to explore the main themes in volunteering to give a greater understanding of how Muslim Australians, especially youth, may be supported to pursue voluntary work opportunities. This was achieved by exploring

previous research on volunteering in the areas of youth, faith-communities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Key findings from the National CALD Volunteers Survey and recent Government-initiated Muslim summits assisted the current research in providing information specific to Australia's CALD and Muslim communities, including young people. Findings from the survey and other CALD-background volunteer literature were found to be similar to feedback received from the samples of Muslim Australian youth. Young Muslims identified the same barriers to volunteering as with other youth; lack of acknowledgement, organisational culture and personal constraints. Muslim organisations, for many reasons, made it difficult for the youth to volunteer more 'openly', pinpointing a need for more understanding management from these groups.

While little was found from comprehensive searches on Muslim-specific volunteering, summaries and participant feedback from recent events served as anecdotal evidence to show that young Muslim Australians have the desire and capacity to be involved in communities as volunteers. Several areas of concern for young Muslims can be said to be mostly specific to Muslims only; for example, media training, female-only recreational activities, interfaith activities and the issue of personal identity. Other than these, motivations and barriers to volunteering appeared to be more or less transferable from those faced by members of CALD-background and faith-based community groups. A more thorough investigation would be beneficial in confirming these initial comparisons.

It was reported that many Muslims also carry the additional burden of countering misconceptions of religious identity and discrimination by those outside their own communities. This was shown to both hinder (e.g. restricting young people who want to pursue opportunities) and help (e.g. motivate young people to break stereotypes) Muslim youth's voluntary efforts.

Translating the concept of 'volunteering' was not so much of a problem with Muslim youth as it was with CALD-background communities, except to note that Muslim parents and elders would benefit from a greater understanding of what the concept meant in Australia. Other tried-and-tested solutions that worked to assist with breaking down barriers for youth and that were also suggested by Muslim youth involved greater exchanges of information between volunteer-involving organisations as well as education of the benefits of not only volunteering, but volunteering with people from diverse backgrounds.

Lastly, the fact that volunteering concepts are natural to Muslims suggests that formalised programs such as the volunteer networks are not necessarily essential in initially instigating Muslims to volunteer. This is especially since they are already volunteering, with such structures, along with the right community attitudes, serving to build on the volunteering constructs that are inherent and familiar qualities to Muslims. The fact that volunteering is not seen as a separate activity to other positive behaviours for Muslims gives explanation to the lack of research in this area. Muslims do not view voluntary work as 'extra' duties, therefore the wider community may fail to recognise the volunteering that is being done.

While volunteering behaviour of Muslim Australians is currently under-researched, findings from the National CALD Volunteers Survey were found to support the small amount of information and anecdotal evidence of Muslims volunteering. It is hoped that this literature overview has firstly demonstrated the

need for further research in this new area, and secondly will assist in supporting future volunteering projects tailored to Muslim Australians, particularly youth, and thirdly, inform the development of resources aimed at volunteer organisations to assist them to involve volunteers from CALD and Muslim backgrounds.

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