

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES FOR REFUGEES FOCUSING ON AFRICAN MUSLIM REFUGEES

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CENTRE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT



University of  
South Australia

International Centre for  
Muslim and non-Muslim  
Understanding

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## Acknowledgments

UTS: CLG wishes to thank the interviewees that participated in this research project and Dr Nahid Kabir for her valuable suggestions. The research was funded by The University of South Australia's International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding (MnM Centre). The Centre is a response to the challenge set by one of Australia's most influential political and social figures: former Prime Minister, the Honourable Bob Hawke. Mr Hawke has made it his life's work to bring people from disparate backgrounds together to create common understanding in situations of dispute and confrontation. In fulfilling the mission set for it by Mr Hawke, the Centre focuses its research and community engagement activities on the triggers for prejudice that present barriers to dialogue. The vision of the MnM Centre is to be an internationally significant research centre, devoted to understanding and transcending the divide between Muslims and non-Muslims, with a strong socio-cultural focus that fosters informed relationships between cultures and identities. The Centre provides a unique forum in which scholars and PhD students develop and disseminate ideas within the framework of a broader social justice agenda.

The MnM Centre consists of a diverse community of scholars who engage intellectually and practically in questions of identity, security, citizenship and belonging, contemporary culture and politics, urban and spatial organisation, extremism and Islamophobia. Wherever possible, the research of the Centre is made accessible to external stakeholders to provide opportunities to engage in dialogue with the aim of continually building greater understanding and influencing positive change. Mediums through which research is disseminated include publications, the media, public speaking engagements, academic conferences and the MnM Centre's public fora. Its staff members and students recognise that broad understanding will not come simply through distributing facts to the general public, but that beliefs and attitudes must change. As a result, they are committed to research that provides people of all cultural and religious backgrounds with the impetus to consider new ways of thinking about other members of their communities while addressing how Muslims, in particular, fit into contemporary communities and cultures. Thus the focus of the MnM Centre's work – its research, its collaboration with other programs and people at the University of South Australia, and its engagement with local and international partners and communities – is identifying ways in which different communities can, should and do encounter and interact with each other.

# 1. Introduction and Context

This report investigates and outlines the activities and programs seven local government councils have currently put in place for newly-arrived refugees.<sup>1</sup> The Report is divided into four sections. The first section contextualises the issue. Section 2 outlines the methodology. Section 3, drawing on local government websites, examines in what ways the seven councils have responded, and what programs they have put in place, to assist African refugees and refugees generally in their local government areas (LGAs). Section 4 presents and discusses the findings from interviews conducted with council personnel working with refugees.

Initially, this exploratory study was to concentrate solely on programs for African Muslim refugees, however it became apparent that there were hardly any local government initiatives that catered specifically for this grouping so the focus was extended to cover programs for African refugees and refugees in general. We examine local government programs in Bankstown, Canterbury and Auburn in Sydney; Townsville and Toowoomba in Queensland; Hume in Victoria and City of Charles Sturt in South Australia. This exploratory research involved scoping and reviewing council websites and interviewing key council personnel.

Australia is a humanitarian partner of the UNHCR and remains in the top five countries of resettlement for refugees (UNHCR, 2012a). The UN 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Australia is a signatory, defines a refugee as:

Any person who owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last decade, between 10,000 and 13,000 people have entered Australia annually through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program – RHP (DIBP, 2011). Australia's Humanitarian Program aims to provide options for refugees who have been forced to leave their homes by armed conflict, persecution and human rights abuses. It has two components:

- The **onshore component** provides protection (asylum) to persons already in Australia who engage Australia's protection obligations under the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, and
- The **offshore component** provides resettlement to persons overseas who are subject to persecution or violation of their human rights, have fled their homeland and have been determined to be refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> This is Stage 1 of the study. Stage 2 will involve interviewing key African representatives and African residents in different communities to assess how they perceive local government initiatives and what they feel needs to be done.

<sup>2</sup> The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees is the key legal document in defining who is a refugee, their rights and the legal obligations of states. Refer to UNHCR: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>

For the 2014-15 financial year, the allocation for Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program is 13,750 places. This includes 11,000 offshore places and 2,750 places for onshore applicants.<sup>3</sup> The onshore element is determined in Australia via a protection visa (subclass 866)<sup>4</sup> which when granted allows a person to live and work in Australia as a permanent resident and have access to Medicare and Centrelink services. Refugees in Australia in recent times come primarily from three regions - the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Refugees do not receive higher benefits than other social security recipients.<sup>5</sup> Most refugees are of working age. A large proportion are unemployed with Hugo (2011:104) outlining that on average even after three years in Australia, a third of refugee-humanitarian settlers remained unemployed. Many refugees also experience 'occupational skidding' whereby refugees do not get jobs commensurate with their qualifications and are often trapped in low income occupations (Hugo, 2011). A recent report by the resettlement organisation AMES also outlined this challenge:

Many highly educated refugees and migrants arrivals like doctors, engineers, teachers, accountants experience downward occupational mobility and significant decline in the recognition of their human capital. Many do not have the experience in Australia and references which are often preferred by Australian employers. The more years a person works in in low skilled and low paid jobs the more difficult it is to maintain professional skills and networks to improve job opportunities (AMES, 2014:15)

For many refugee households the main income support benefit provided by government is the Newstart Allowance, the unemployment benefit. In June 2015 the Newstart payment for a single person was \$259.60 a week. This is well below the poverty line. In December 2014 the Melbourne Institute calculated that for a single person the poverty line was \$511.69 per week including housing, and \$344.36 a week excluding accommodation costs (Melbourne Institute, 2014).

In last two decades the number of refugees in Australia originating from African countries has increased substantially. Between June 1997 and June 2007, 22,445 refugees from Sudan were settled under the humanitarian program, 2,714 from Ethiopia, 2,477 from Sierra Leone, 2,373 from Somalia and 3,796 from Central and West Africa (ABS, 2008;). In 2009-10, 29% of all people settled in terms of Australia's Humanitarian Visa Program came from Africa (Department of Immigration and Border Protection Refugees, 2014; ABS, 2012). In the 2013-14, most of the African refugees settled in Australia came from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (241); Eritrea (187); Somalia (185) and Ethiopia (129) (Karlsen, 2015). The following table shows the number of offshore convention refugees resettled to Australia (by country of birth) in 2013-14:

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Refugee Council of Australia: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/fact-sheets/faqs/faq-info-about-refugees-asylum-seekers-and-australias-refugee-and-humanitarian-program>

<sup>4</sup> Protection visa (subclass 866) refer to: <http://www.immi.gov.au/visas/pages/866.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> For a number of years a hoax email was in circulation claiming that refugees receive more money from Centrelink than age pensioners. Refer to: Hoax e-mails: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/fact-sheets/myths-about-refugees/hoax-emails/>

TABLE 1: COUNTRY OF BIRTH OF OFFSHORE CONVENTION REFUGEES

Country of Birth	Numbers of refugee visas granted
Afghanistan	2,531
Myanmar	1,145
Iraq	829
Bhutan	312
Syria	297
Iran	269
Congo (DRC)	241
Eritrea	187
Somalia	185
Ethiopia	125
Others	375
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,501</b>

Source: Immigration Department, '[Australia's Humanitarian Program 2013–14 \(at a glance\)](#)'.

A recent review of literature on refugees concluded that there were significant challenges for refugees who resettled in Australia and that government support was inadequate:

In overall terms, the literature suggests that it takes between 10 to 15 years for refugees to become 'successfully' and 'fully' resettled and integrated into Australia. This is at least double the length of time direct support to refugees is provided by the government under the HSS [Humanitarian Settlement Services] and SGP [Settlement Grants Program]. This time lag between the end of Commonwealth-funded support for refugees and achieving successful resettlement outcomes raises questions as to how refugees manage to achieve this outcome (Flatau, *et al.*, 2014:31).

The resettlement experiences of refugees, in particular those fleeing war-torn environments and persecution, are particularly challenging. Khawaja *et al.* (2008) found that almost all refugees have been forcibly displaced from their home countries due to war, ethnic persecution or famine, or a combination of all three. Forced displacement is often accompanied by direct experience of torture, physical and sexual abuse, separation from family members and living in camps or detention centres. The end result is that a large proportion of refugees suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and require considerable support to cope. The literature on refugee adaptation demonstrates that whilst pre-migration experiences have a significant impact on psychological distress, post-migration factors such as difficulties with resettlement and the loss of social and cultural supports add to PTSD symptoms (Flatau, *et al.*, 2014: 16). Besides PTSD, Porter and Haslam's (2005) meta-analysis of the literature identified a number of post-migration conditions such as housing difficulties, unemployment and financial stress as factors contributing to poor mental health outcomes (Khawaja *et al.*, 2008: 490).

Colic-Peisker and Tilbury (2003; 2007) have developed a typology of refugee resettlement styles in Australia. The typology captures the diversity of refugee aspirations and the array of resources (educational, psychological, financial and social) that individuals and families possess to assist them in resettling. They concluded that refugees characterised as 'achievers' and

'consumers' are said to exhibit an active style of resettlement. On the other hand, refugees characterised as 'endurers' and 'victims' are those who buckle under the multiple challenges of being forced to leave their countries and communities and resettle in a vastly different social environment. They demonstrate this in particular by contrasting the settlement and employment experiences of eastern European (mainly Bosnian), Middle Eastern (mainly Iraqi) and African (from several sub-Saharan countries) refugees which found that 'whiteness' and a relative ethnic 'invisibility' was seen as an advantage in the Australian context (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007). The typology points to the need for governments and service providers in particular to be aware of the diversity of refugee needs.

The Australian government provides a number of services to address the resettlement needs of newly arrived humanitarian entrants for up to five years after their arrival. The Humanitarian Support Service (HSS)<sup>6</sup> provides support for refugees for their first six months after arrival. The services include 'case coordination, information and referral ... on-arrival reception and assistance ... accommodation services ... [and] short-term torture and trauma counselling services' (Reiner, 2010: 16). After this support ends refugees can access less intensive supports. There are also specialised settlement services that are designed specifically to assist migrants and refugees with early settlement needs. Services are provided by governments, community organisations and the private sector. Some specialist services, such as torture and trauma counselling services are directed towards the special needs of humanitarian entrants. The specialised settlement services include the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP); Complex Case Support (CCS); Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS); Settlement Grants Program (SGP); and the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS). These programs are administered by the Department of Social Services (DSS).<sup>7</sup> Specific examples of programs include:

1. Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO).<sup>8</sup> AUSCO is made accessible to Refugee and Special Humanitarian Programme entrants over the age of five years and provided prior to their departure for Australia. AUSCO gives practical advice about the journey to Australia, including quarantine laws and information about what to expect post-arrival. The programme was first established in 2003 in recognition of the need for orientation for refugees from Africa. AUSCO has since expanded and is now offered in four regions: Africa, South Asia, South East Asia and the Middle East. Additional courses are provided in other locations as required. Courses are designed for and delivered to four main groups: adults, youth, children, and pre-literate entrants.

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<sup>6</sup> Humanitarian Support Service refer to: <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services/humanitarian-settlement-services-hss>

<sup>7</sup> Refer to Department of Social Services: <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services>

<sup>8</sup> Refer to Australian Cultural Orientation Program: <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/a-multicultural-australia/the-australian-cultural-orientation-ausco-programme>

2. Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP).<sup>9</sup> In operation since 1948 this is the largest program administered under the government's overall settlement program for refugees. Under this voluntary program all eligible refugees are entitled to 510 hours of English language courses during their first five years of settlement in Australia. Refugees with 'special needs' can receive up to a further 400 hours of tuition.
3. Settlement Grants Program (SGP).<sup>10</sup> The SGP provides case management, information, advice, referrals, community development and engagement activities for eligible clients who have recently arrived in Australia. The program is designed to enable clients to become self-reliant and to participate in society and the wider community as quickly as possible after arrival in Australia.

It would appear that the support provided is usually inadequate for African refugees in particular. A research paper prepared for the Australian Parliament concluded:

Despite the extra attention the recent refugees from Africa are receiving in the planning and delivery of settlement services, there has been some concern expressed by refugee advocates and other members of the community that Australia has not been adequately prepared to cope with the special needs of African refugees (Spinks, 2009: 10).

It is evident from the research that refugees from Africa face major difficulties settling. Besides having experienced the loss of family members, years of war and attendant brutality and then extremely harsh living conditions in refugee camps, many have minimal formal education and literacy and poor or no English language skills (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2010; Dandy, 2009; Spinks, 2009). A major problem they face in Australia is unemployment (Kabir, 2015; Australian Parliament, 2008; Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007; Reiner, 2010). A study by Pe-Pua *et al.* (2010) on the needs of Australian Muslim families found that recent immigrants struggled to settle mainly due to difficulties in finding work. Many reported a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem. An Australian Human Rights Commission report found that besides a lack of skills, discrimination was a central factor preventing employment and '[t]hese barriers were perceived to be further compounded for Muslim African Australians, especially women who wear the hijab' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2010: 12). Another concern is that when an African woman finds employment and her husband remains unemployed, the shifting of roles can lead to serious family tension. Research suggests that this problem is particularly acute in African Muslim households (Reiner 2010).

One important initiative is the Refugee Welcome Zone, an initiative of the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA). It currently involves 87 local government councils around the country (RCOA, 2013: 3). A Refugee Welcome Zone is a Local Government Area (LGA) that has made a commitment to welcoming refugees into the community, upholding their human rights, demonstrating compassion and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community. The

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<sup>9</sup> Refer to Adult Migrant English Program: <https://www.education.gov.au/amep>

<sup>10</sup> Refer to Settlement Grants Program: <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/settlement-services/settlement-grants/what-is-the-settlement-grants-program>

Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration does not confer any formal obligations and Refugee Welcome Zones are not required to uphold any statutory responsibilities, to make financial commitments or enter into reporting accountabilities. The signing of the Declaration is simply a way of demonstrating broad support for the principles it contains and the actions or activities undertaken by Refugee Welcome Zones are not specific requirements of the Declaration. However, any initiatives which help to create a welcoming atmosphere and assist the settlement of refugees and their communities are welcomed and encouraged. The importance of local government in building strong, socially cohesive communities recently led the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government to develop an on-line interactive resource for Councils, *Building Social Cohesion in our Communities*, which is aimed at assisting Councils understand and engage with their communities<sup>11</sup>.

The limited research that has been done indicates that local government support for African refugees is limited. A study of local governments and their attempts to facilitate better relations between Muslims and non-Muslims concluded that, 'Local councils are not as active as they might be in sponsoring and fostering relationship building activities' (Wise and Ali, 2008: 2). An Australian Human Rights study identified 'issues around the provision of services, especially service quality and service gaps (including cultural competence) as barriers to social inclusion for newly arrived African refugees and humanitarian entrants' (2010: 9). Community members also felt that often the services offered were not appropriate and in some instances had the potential to 'inadvertently undermine the collectivist basis that is crucial to African Australians communities, particularly the family unit' (2010: 9).

A recent community consultation review undertaken by the Refugees Council of Australia (2014) found a number of 'settlement challenges' for refugees in Australia. The report in particular noted ongoing challenges of 'employment, education, housing, health and particular challenges facing young people, women at risk and people with a disability' (Refugee Council of Australia, 2014: 7). The review noted that the refugee communities consulted spoke of the need for better coordination and planning of settlement services across the different levels of government. Mechanisms for 'communication, coordination and collaboration on settlements with local government authorities were identified as a gap and as a potential strategy for improving service delivery' (Refugee Council of Australia, 2014: 79).

The Australian Human Rights Commission have undertaken recent work with Arab<sup>12</sup> and Muslim Australians and African Australians,<sup>13</sup> suggesting that these communities are at a higher risk of experiencing discrimination and prejudice. Studies have found that African Muslims have to not only endure anti-Muslim sentiments within the broader community but also racist prejudice (Kabir, 2015; Alcorn, 2015; Sohrabi and Farquharson, 2015; Markus, 2014; Stewart, Pedersen and Paradies, 2014). Underlying these attitudes is a discourse that associates

<sup>11</sup> Building Social Cohesion in our Communities: <http://www.acefg.org.au/socialcohesion>

<sup>12</sup> Refer to: Australian Human Rights Commission (2008) *A dialogue on human rights and responsibilities* Report on the Commission's Muslim Women's Project 2006.

At: [http://humanrights.gov.au/racial\\_discrimination/livingspirit/index.html](http://humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/livingspirit/index.html)

<sup>13</sup> Refer to Australian Human Rights Commission (2010), *In our own words African Australians: A review of human rights and social inclusion issues*, At: <http://humanrights.gov.au/africanaus/review/index.html>

Muslims with intolerance, violence, misogyny and terrorism (Sohrabi and Farquharson, 2015). A recent forum in the City of Charles Sturt in South Australia aimed to encourage Muslim immigrants to discuss their settlement matters and to enhance a better understanding between service providers and the Muslim migrant community (Kabir, 2015). Panel members representing the Muslim community spoke about their personal experiences:

They mentioned that Islamophobia in the wider society has increased. For example, visible Muslim women who wear the *hijabs* (headscarves) can be subjected to vilification by some members of the wider society in public places (Kabir, 2015:4).

Participants also outlined their difficulties in entering the job market and lengthy delays in the granting of permanent residency.

It is evident that local government has the potential to play a central role in facilitating the settling in of African Muslim refugees. However, there has been no major study that has examined what services local governments are providing, and how the African Muslim population perceives these services and the role of local government. The next section provides a summary of the methodology undertaken for this exploratory research.

## 2. Methodology

### *Selection of Councils<sup>14</sup>*

The most recently available census data was reviewed to capture local governments where a substantial proportion of the population in the LGA is Muslim, or alternatively, where the African Muslim population is a substantial part of the Muslim population in the LGA concerned. In the latter LGAs, as illustrated in Table 1, the Muslim population represents a small part of the overall population from the period 2008-2012.

TABLE 2: AFRICAN MUSLIM POPULATION IN VARIOUS LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (JUNE 2011)

Local Government Area	Muslim population as % of total population	# of African Muslim Population	African Muslim population as % of total Muslim population	% of African Muslim population arrived in last 5 years as % of total African Muslim population in that LGA	# of African Muslim population arrived in last 5 years	LGA African Muslim population arrived in last 5 years as % of all African Muslims arrived in Australia in last 5 years	African Muslim population arrived in last 18 months as % of total African Muslim population arrived in last 5 years
Auburn City Council	25.50%	602	3.20%	28.90%	174	1.87%	22.41%
Canterbury City Council	16.62%	1104	4.83%	32.88%	363	3.90%	21.49%
Bankstown City Council	19.08%	1018	2.93%	24.56%	250	1.94%	18.8%
City of Hume	15.91%	761	2.85%	20.63%	157	1.68%	25.48%
Townsville City Council	0.33%	166	29.12%	80.72%	134	1.44%	57.46%
Toowoomba Regional Council	0.66%	161	17.52%	86.34%	139	1.49%	41.01%
City of Charles Sturt	1.94%	372	18.28%	55.65%	207	2.22%	28.02%

<sup>14</sup> The study was granted ethics clearance from the University of Technology Sydney in June 2014.

Table 2 indicates that in Auburn, Canterbury, Bankstown and Hume, the Muslim population is a sizeable proportion of the total population and that although the African Muslim population is a small proportion of the population, the absolute numbers are substantial. In Townsville, Toowoomba and City of Charles Sturt the Muslim population is small, however the proportion of the Muslim population that is African is large.

**Audit of local government initiatives**

A desktop review of key documentation and web source information was undertaken to achieve three key research aims - to assist in formulating a baseline understanding of the seven councils selected for this research; to identify any initiatives and programs specifically developed for African-Muslim refugees and to identify initiatives and programs geared towards the refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities at large.

**Semi-structured interviews with relevant local government employees**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with six council personnel from locations across Australia. All of the interviewees were working with refugee communities as multicultural liaison workers, community development workers or as settlement grant program officers within councils. The identities and location of the participants are withheld to enable an open discussion of service provision within council. Table 3 provides the general location of participants.

TABLE 3: LOCATIONS OF COUNCIL PARTICIPANTS

<b>Pseudonym and Role</b>	<b>Location</b>
Lorna (Multicultural Officer)	Suburban Sydney
Paula (Community Development Officer)	Suburban Sydney
Yuvisthi (Multicultural Officer)	Suburban Adelaide
Aisha (Community Development Officer)	Suburban Melbourne
Steven (Cultural Diversity Officer)	Regional QLD
Kathleen (Community Development Officer)	Suburban Melbourne

The interviews covered the following themes:

- The key issues African Muslim refugees, refugees in general and CALD communities face in the LGA concerned.
- What programs are in place and the effectiveness of the programs in question.
- The history of their establishment and implementation.
- The challenges local governments face in implementing effective programs.
- The improvements that could be implemented and the council’s plans for the future.

- Plans for the future.

### *Limitations*

This report is an exploratory review and presents an initial scoping of seven councils to provide a baseline understanding of specific initiatives for refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

### 3. Review of local government support for African refugees

This section draws on available council material to outline activities, programs and services provided for refugees and CALD residents. As mentioned, although our initial focus was to identify and discuss programs specifically developed for African Muslim refugees, the dearth of such programs resulted in a broadening of the focus to cover programs targeting refugees as a whole.

#### Auburn City Council

Auburn City Council is a local government area located about 15 kilometres west of Sydney's CBD.<sup>15</sup> The council area is one of the most diverse LGAs in Australia. In June 2011, just under two thirds of its 74,000 residents were born outside of Australia and only 14.5% were of Australian or English ancestry. Just over a quarter of the residents were Muslim. The large part of the Muslim population is Turkish or Lebanese. The largest African community was Somalian (320 residents), followed by Sudanese (261). The Auburn Council runs and sponsors a number of programs for refugees and newly arrived migrants but none of the programs are specifically orientated to the African Muslim population.

In 2004 Auburn was declared a Refugee Welcome Zone. In announcing the initiative the council commented,

Auburn City Council recognises the challenges that refugees face in the journey from their homeland to this country, and acknowledges the positive and ongoing contribution that refugees make to our local community, and to Australia.<sup>16</sup>

The Auburn LGA has established a range of activities for the integration of its refugee community into the wider Auburn community. Following the increase in the proportion of African refugees to the LGA, the NSW Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW funded the **Somali Community Capacity Project**, from March 2011 to April 2014 (Auburn City Council 2014, *Somali Resources*). The project funding aimed to increase the capacity of service providers and other key stakeholders, to more effectively work alongside, and provide service and support to, the local Somali community (Auburn City Council 2014, *Somali Resources*).

Similarly, Auburn City Council has supported its Muslim population by running projects such as a ten-week, women only, *Learn to Swim Program* (Wise & Ali 2008). This program provided 72 women from low-income backgrounds living in the Auburn LGA with swimming lessons, health programs, surf safety, and resuscitation classes, with the purpose of providing 'enjoyable, healthy activity that would link them with other women from within and beyond their own communities' (Wise & Ali 2008, p. 149). Such projects as this are often joint ventures, with

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<sup>15</sup> Auburn City Council: <http://www.auburn.nsw.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> Refer to: Museums & Galleries of NSW: <http://mgnsw.org.au/sector/support/imagine/nominees-2013/exhibitions-1-2-staff/>

LGAs partnering with other organisations, government departments and community groups. For instance, the ***Learn to Swim Program*** was a joint initiative of Auburn City Council, the Auburn Migrant Resource Centre, the Department of Sport and Recreation, Auburn Community Health and the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) (Wise & Ali 2008, p. 149).

A key initiative in the Auburn LGA is *Refugee Week*. The main aims of Refugee Week are to 'help break down social and cultural barriers, actively promote cultural awareness and to celebrate the strength of diversity through efficient delivery of Council's wide range of services' (Auburn City Council Annual Report 2009/2010, pp. 12).

Auburn Council organises a range of Refugee Week activities in celebration of its ethnically-diverse refugee population:

- In 2014 Auburn Council organised the innovative *Refugee Camp in My Neighbourhood* activity, which saw a 'refugee camp' built on Council grounds. The activity offered participants the opportunity to 'become' a 'refugee', and personally face the harrowing experiences and circumstances of refugees as they fled persecution. The *Refugee Camp in my Neighbourhood* project was developed through a partnership with more than 30 community organisations. Initial consultations with the UNSW Centre for Refugee Research engaged more than 100 local community members, including young people, from refugee and asylum seeker communities to design the simulated camp and provide ideas as to how the camp should look and what physical elements need to be included. What resulted was a camp that reflected the personal stories and images as told by members of Auburn's diverse refugee community. The simulated camp was first piloted and held during Refugee Week in June 2014. Over 1,400 people took part in tours during the week-long exhibition. In 2015 it ran for 3 weeks from 9 to 26 June.<sup>17</sup>
- In 2013 Council commissioned a digital film, *Journeys to Auburn*, in which several high-achieving community-oriented Auburn residents who came to Australia as refugees, three of whom were of African origin, were interviewed about their experience of fleeing from persecution and finding a home in Auburn. The portraits of these residents are also featured in *Immersed*, an exhibition by award-winning photographer George Voulgaropolous. In years past, the Somali Welfare and Cultural Association produced two videos encapsulating the strength and resilience of refugees during the resettlement process.
- In partnership with local services, the *Celebration of Freedom* event featured music from around the world; a flag display representing the refugee journey of fleeing from persecution into lives of safety and empowerment in Australia and a visual presentation of interesting information and facts targeting stereotypes about refugees. As part of Auburn's *Youth Strategy*, an award ceremony was held for 32 'outstanding' young people aged 12 to 25 from refugee backgrounds, and a *Careers Expo* was organised for young people by the Muslim Students Association.

Apart from events enjoyed during Refugee Week celebrations, several additional annual programs and activities are also overseen and/or supported by the Auburn Council:

<sup>17</sup> Refer to: <http://refugeeweekauburn.com.au/about/>

The annual **Auburn Africultures Festival**<sup>18</sup> is Sydney's primary celebration of African traditions and cultures and 12,000 people attended the festival in 2014, then in its sixth consecutive year of operation. Auburn Council organises the event in partnership with the Somali Welfare and Cultural Association; service providers; local businesses; and a committee consisting of volunteers who represent a number of African countries. In 2013, the festival offered a multitude of cultural amusements, including drumming and dance workshops; rock climbing; fashion shows; and cultural music. Football United and the AFL offered sports skills workshops, and *Africultures* partnered with the African Film Festival to film the event. The partnership also saw film-making workshop offered to young people.

In celebration of Auburn's cultural and linguistically diverse community (CALD), the **Flavours of Auburn** event, part of the Crave Sydney International Food Festival, offers participants the opportunity to sample a variety of international food including cuisine from Sierra Leone; Somalia; Sudan; and Ethiopia. The event is organised by the Council's Community Development team and Auburn Small Community Organisation Network (ASCON). In 2012, Flavours of Auburn was the winner of the "Highly Commended for an Outstanding Project for a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Group/Organisation" category at ZEST Awards, an event "recognising, honouring and celebrating the outstanding contribution made by community services operating across the Greater Western Sydney region" (Auburn City Council 2012).<sup>19</sup> In addition to these periodic activities, Auburn City Council also demonstrates a long-term commitment to ensuring the ongoing welfare of its refugee residents. This is evidenced by the following Council programs, each of which is developed specifically for young people:

- Targeted at refugee and newly-arrived young people is the **Auburn United Football Program**, consisting of weekly in-school; after-school; weekend; and holiday camp football activities. The program also offers young people of refugee background the opportunity to volunteer as coaches and referees, ensuring the development of leadership skills and role model capabilities as part of their wider personal development (Arlington and Bossi, 8/2/14; Morgan, 2007).

For young people aged 12 -24 from migrant and refugee backgrounds residing in Auburn, Auburn Diversity Services Inc<sup>20</sup> (ADSI) delivered the **Homework Help Program** as part of their Humanitarian Young People Project. The *Homework Help Program* is a settlement support service and provides 90-minute tuition sessions two days a week for Maths, English, Geography and Science as per the school curriculum. In 2011, ADSI noted an intention to increase its weekly program availability owing to high demand. In addition, ADSI also aimed to provide increased support for *Homework Help* tutors by educating them about the issues local tutors face when tutoring students of migrant and refugee backgrounds, and equipping them with the necessary skills.

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<sup>18</sup> Refer to *Auburn Africultures*: <https://www.facebook.com/africulturesfestival>

<sup>19</sup> Refer to: Taste of Success for Flavours of Auburn Festival (2/3/12):

<http://www.auburn.nsw.gov.au/Welcome/News/Pages/Flavours%20of%20Auburn%20Festival%20Award%20Win.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> Refer to Auburn Diversity Services Inc: <http://www.adsi.org.au/>

- Under the banner of supporting refugees and newly-arrived young people, Auburn LGA aims to improve young people's physical health and mental wellbeing. The Auburn Council has spent a substantial amount developing sporting facilities and programs. The goal is to encourage community participation among young people of refugee background and give them the opportunity to develop their physical fitness. Council also notes that such programs have a preventative focus by diverging young people from engaging in risk-taking behaviours.
- Catering specifically to African young people is the ***African Young People Refugee Recreational Program***, organised in conjunction with the Somali Welfare and Cultural Association. In the past, Council has also allocated funding to the ***Capoeira Angola Cultural Centre*** to provide Capoeira classes (a form of dance that originated in Brazil) to refugee young people between 10 and 17 years of age. Council believed Capoeira to be especially pertinent to youth of African background; as participants are required to pay respect to their elder Capoeira masters, it was anticipated that such demonstrations would encourage cultural knowledge-seeking and greater deference for community elders' opinions and concerns for their welfare.
- In 2008 Council provided funding for the Auburn Youth Centre's ***Girls Only Days***.<sup>21</sup> Semi-structured arts and crafts activities such as henna painting; hair braiding; painting; African drumming; weaving; and nail art decorating were offered to young women aged 12-24 from both newly-arrived refugee and established communities. The aims of the program were to provide a forum for young women's artistic and creative expression; improve their access to local and community services; and promote understanding and skills-sharing across cultures. This program has continued at Auburn Youth Centre.

Catering to Auburn's resident refugee community more broadly are the following programs:

- In an effort to foster smooth resettlement, Auburn Council initiates public ***community education initiatives*** for newly-arrived refugees and migrants. Importantly, these are culturally-appropriate and targeted to the needs of specific communities. They include information sessions on Council and community services; introductory information sessions on the Australian Legal System; an Aboriginal culture and heritage education program; and a broader civic education program. Council acknowledges that education initiatives are found to be especially effective for connecting with small and emerging refugee communities that require information on the Australian legal system, procedures and government benefits and services. Improving refugee and TPV resident' access to mainstream services is also one of Council's funding priorities.
- As part of Council's ***Auburn Welcomes You***<sup>22</sup> event, which occurs annually during Local Government Week, new residents - especially newly-arrived refugees and migrants – are offered workshop seminars on Council services, housing, employment, and information regarding what service providers, community services and organisations are available within Auburn LGA. Local community groups that identify and reach out to isolated members of the community with the aim of delivering culturally-appropriate,

<sup>21</sup> Refer to: <http://www.communitysupport.org.au/csyn/org/Auburn-Youth-Centre>

<sup>22</sup> Refer to: <http://wentworthpointcommunity.org/news-photos/auburn-welcomes-you-event-for-new-residents-to-our-local-community>

targeted, needs-based community education initiatives are also actively supported by Council.

Council has also established employment and training programs and initiatives. The **Auburn Migrant and Refugee Employment Action Plan** comprises sustainable and ongoing employment strategies for the respective groups, developed in consultation with the community as well as key stakeholders. Key strategies include the **Working across Cultures** training course for employment providers and the **Partners in Employment for Refugees and Migrants (PIERM)** network meetings. The latter brings together the local community and training and employment providers in the LGA every three months. Both strategies seek to encourage the active participation of all parties concerned in helping newly-arrived residents find employment. The **student careers expo** organised by the Muslim Students Association was also a key employment strategy for youth.

Council also recognizes the importance of funding projects and services which specifically target children and families. For migrant, refugee and temporary protection visa holder (TPV) residents, it provides culture and language-specific positive parenting groups and supported playgroups. Free childcare for mothers was also funded by Council in order to ensure that newly arrived refugee and migrant women could better access education and training programs.

In an endeavour to foster artistic expression Council also funded the **Auburn Poets & Writers Group**. Ten meetings and six master-classes were held for refugee, migrant and Australian born residents, increasing their access to the arts; helping to develop writing skills and promoting cross-cultural understanding between participants. An underlying aim of the program is to improve participants' mental wellbeing.<sup>23</sup>

Auburn Council also funded the **Information and Cultural Exchange** organisation to facilitate greater cross-cultural understanding. Fifty workers and volunteers from 'small to medium funded and non-funded non-profit organisations' were offered the opportunity to develop skills in IT and digital media (Auburn City Council 21/05/2008 Minutes, pp. 55). Council noted that the project specifically targeted newly-arrived migrant and refugee communities. The skills developed by participants were to be utilised on their own digital media projects.

Recognizing the importance of stress management and both physical and mental wellbeing, Council also identified the provision of gentle exercise programs for refugees as a local funding priority.

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<sup>23</sup> Auburn Poets and Writers Group Meeting refer to: <http://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/auburn-poets-and-writers-group-meeting-apwg-tickets-14340435629>

## Bankstown City Council

Bankstown City Council is in the south-west of Sydney, 20 kilometres from Sydney CBD. Its population in 2013 was just over 200,000, making it one of the largest LGAs in New South Wales.<sup>24</sup> Just under one in five residents are Muslim, and in June 2011 just over a thousand residents were African Muslims. In 2003, Bankstown was declared a Refugee Welcome Zone.<sup>25</sup> In 2008 Bankstown Council proved its ongoing commitment to upholding the human rights of refugees by becoming the first council in Australia to sign the Refugee Council of Australia's *Refugee Charter*. The *Charter* is a statement of 12 ethical and humane principles affirming support and respect for the plight of refugees. Council's strong support of the Charter reinforces its commitment to:

- inform the refugee sector and the wider community about the basic principles of refugee protection;
- reinforce the fact that refugee protection is about human rights;
- remind [Council] that behind these principles is the weight of international law;
- remind the various groups working with and for refugees that there are common principles that bind us all;
- strengthen advocacy in the sector; and
- inspire and energise those working in the sector, in particular when the challenges seem insurmountable (Refugee Council of Australia website 2011).

Council provides annual funding for the celebration of **National Refugee Week**, **World Refugee Day** and **Harmony Day**. Such celebrations of diversity were viewed as a necessity by participants during Council's community and stakeholder consultations. Accordingly, Council views Refugee Week as an opportunity for Bankstown's diverse groups to showcase their culture and demonstrate their talents. Community and stakeholder groups stress that Council's support and promotion of these yearly celebrations represent leadership at the local level, thereby helping to encourage and build greater community acceptance and support for refugee communities.

In past years Bankstown Council has organised the following Refugee Week activities:

- As part of Harmony Day celebrations in 2013, Council held a concert at Bankstown Arts Centre that offered attendees the opportunity to hear and celebrate the unique stories of the LGA's refugee residents.
- During Refugee Week 2013, Refugee Information Sessions were held by the Canterbury Bankstown Migrant Interagency (CBMI, as noted above). The sessions were attended by over 60 individuals.

<sup>24</sup> Bankstown Community Profile refer to: <http://profile.id.com.au/bankstown/home>

<sup>25</sup> Refer to Bankstown Refugee Welcome Zone: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/portfolio-item/bankstown-city-council/>

As evidenced by Council's **Multicultural Bankstown Strategy 2007 – 2012**,<sup>26</sup> Council organises and/or supports a range of services, programs and activities for residents of its CALD community. The Strategy specified the (then) current issues and initiatives and future planning directions for the City's CALD community. The four overarching goals Council sought to foster in and for residents were leadership and participation; community harmony; access and equity; and economic and cultural opportunities.

Specifically in relation to Bankstown's refugee residents, the Strategy highlighted the following activities:

- For refugee and CALD young people, Council's **Youth Step-up** project piloted four-hour interactive workshops for 30 young people from local schools and refugee communities. The project operated throughout 2013. The workshops taught basic employment strategies, skill development related to resume-writing, presentation and interviewing. More generally, the workshops endeavour to simplify the Australian labour market and explain the issues around employment. Also in 2013, *the Youth Step-up* project utilised grant funding to develop a free smart phone app for refugee and CALD young people. The purpose of the app is to strengthen soft-skill development in young job seekers to increase their chances of finding and maintaining employment. The app was launched in 2014.<sup>27</sup> The *Youth Step-up* project has been in operation for over two years, and workbooks and a *Facilitators' Guide* has been developed to guide young people on the skills and techniques highlighted above. *Young people Step-up* was initiated by Greenacre Area Neighbourhood Centre (GANC) and collaboratively developed by Bankstown City Council, Melkite Catholic Welfare Association, MTC Work Solutions and Centrelink.
- As is evident by its name, the **CALD Child and Family Mental Health Working Party** was established to address issues pertaining to the mental health and wellbeing of Bankstown families and children. Interactive workshops held in 2011 provided 'education on self-care [sic] for parents with young families'<sup>28</sup>. The working party was funded by Council's grant process and saw collaboration between the Department of Human Services; Melkite Welfare Association; Baptist Community Services LifeCare; Metro Migrant Resource Centre; Family Relationship Centre; Bankstown Community Resource Group; Families NSW; and Benevolent Society. Its primary aim was to foster community engagement with refugees, new migrants, young people and other isolated and disengaged groups in the community.

Council is cognisant of the significant disadvantages refugees face and that many do not have community structures and networks (Harding 2004, cited by Bankstown Multicultural Strategy 2007 – 2012, 15). Council makes reference to African refugee communities in particular and

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<sup>26</sup> Refer to Multicultural Bankstown Strategy 2007-2012:

<http://www.bankstown.nsw.gov.au/index.aspx?nid=165>

<sup>27</sup> Refer to *Youth StepUP*: <http://www.youthstepupbankstown.com.au/>

<sup>28</sup> Refer to Bankstown Refugee Welcome Zone: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/portfolio-item/bankstown-city-council/>

stressed that the wider community's tolerance and acceptance during refugees' difficult resettlement process is crucial. An interesting initiative that Council has in place to facilitate the settlement of humanitarian visa-entrants is the monitoring and analysis of Department of Social Services (DSS) settlement-data trends within the LGA. Such analysis allows Council to better understand the demographics and service needs of new settlers and the communities to which they belong, and more effectively locate and consult with representatives from small communities which are at risk of being overlooked.

The Council also provides grant funding for organisations seeking to develop projects which meet the needs of small, mainly refugee, communities. Funding between \$500 and \$15,000 is considered for allocation under this program. In 2013/14 Council allocated a total of \$465,394 towards community grants; organisations such as the Australia-West Africa Community Welfare Association were awarded \$1,000 to run the Brave Men's Project (Bankstown City Council, 2015).

In Bankstown, multiple non-government and community-based organisations seek to meet the service- and program-needs of the City's CALD residents. Canterbury Bankstown Migrant Interagency (CBMI), coordinated by the Bankstown Area Multicultural Network<sup>29</sup> (BAMN) and the Canterbury Bankstown Multicultural Resource Centre (CBMRC)<sup>30</sup>, encompasses many of these organisations in a collaborative network. This network supports refugees living in Canterbury and Bankstown in areas such as housing, immigration, health early intervention and employment. In addition to service provision as highlighted above, the CBMRC also addresses and raises awareness of issues affecting migrants and refugees, and undertakes advocacy and lobbying on these groups' behalf. Local governments liaise with these organisation to run events such as refugee week.

As a community-based organisation, the CBMRC is also responsible for several initiatives seeking to assist small and emerging communities. These include:

- The employment of a *Small and Emerging Communities Worker* at CBMRC to assist with settlement service provision for African communities, as well as communities from the Indian subcontinent. A Community Settlement Services Support Worker from the Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre (BMRC) is also present at the CBMRC once a week to connect with Sierra Leone community members.
- For members of small communities, CBMRC also organises general information sessions as well as specific support programs such as spoken-English classes. For employees of agencies in the area, CBMRC also provides training workshops and information sessions on working effectively with small and emerging communities. CBMRC is also utilised by other organisations as a space in which to meet clients, as is

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<sup>29</sup> Refer to Bankstown Area Multicultural Network <http://www.nswhaccdos.org.au/contacts/bankstown-area-multicultural-network/40cf8292-8312-4acd-8081-6bb2c1caecb0?key=LB4raX>

<sup>30</sup> Refer to: Canterbury Bankstown Migrant Resource Centre Inc:  
<http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/directories/listing?id=39622>

most notably demonstrated by employees of the Sudanese Australian Organisation of Australia.

## Canterbury City Council

Canterbury is in south-west Sydney, located 13 kilometres from Sydney CBD. The population of Canterbury LGA was 137,4554 at the time of the 2011 Census, and 16.6% of the population was Muslim. As a proportion, the African Muslim population was small, less than 5% of the Muslim population, but in absolute numbers it was sizeable. Just over 1,100 African Muslims were resident in the Canterbury LGA in 2011. The LGA was declared a Refugee Welcome Zone in 2002.<sup>31</sup> Many of the newly-arrived residents choosing to settle in Canterbury are refugees, or are otherwise sponsored under the Department of Immigration's *Family Reunion Program*.

Canterbury City Council organises a range of activities for Refugee Week, which constitutes the primary celebration of its resident refugee community.<sup>32</sup> As specified by Council's *City Plan* and its *Refugee Welcome Zone in Canterbury Policy*, Council employees play a leading role in its Refugee Week Working Party. An aim of the Working Party is to work collaboratively with community partners to deliver projects celebrating the City's refugee population. Council organises or supports several Refugee Week activities:

- In 2014, in recognition of the unique life experiences of its refugee residents, Council provided the Canterbury Bankstown Migrant Interagency (CBMI) funding for the production and launch of films such as *Listen Up! Australia* and *Resisting from Within*. The latter DVD saw the involvement of over 100 residents and community workers. The former was screened at Bankstown Hoyts Cinema and was followed by a refugee movie awards night.
- Specifically directed at Canterbury's African refugee community, Refugee Week also saw the launch of two mental health and wellbeing workshops for African community leaders. The workshops were organised by the Emerging Communities Resource Centre and conducted in partnership with mental health agencies.
- With the aim of promoting cross-cultural understanding among residents of the wider Canterbury community, the City of Canterbury Multicultural Advisory Committee, in partnership with Refugee Council Australia, held two community forums on refugees. Participants had the opportunity to learn about the impact of refugee policies, understand how Australian policies compare to those of other countries and meet and hear the success stories of resident refugees. In past years, over 60 participants attended *Refugee Information Sessions* offered by Council, and over 200 individuals contributed to the launch of an information-based presentation of case studies by refugee groups.

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<sup>31</sup> Refer to: Refugee Welcome Forums: <http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/Council/News-Updates/Media-Releases/Refugee-Welcome-Forums>

<sup>32</sup> Refer to Canterbury Council Refugee Week: <http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/Discover/Events-in-Our-City/Refugee-Week-2015>

- Also in partnership with CBMI, in past years Council funded a Refugee Week activity for young families of refugee background. Children were able to partake in art and craft activities. Facilitated by the Council's Multicultural Advisory Committee and CBMI, the **Canterbury Refugee Youth Photo-story Project** launched *Freedom from Fear*, a DVD featuring a compilation of photographs and personal stories by 11 Sudanese, Sierra Leonean and Iraqi young people of refugee background. These young residents were between 15 and 22 years of age, and their stories revolved around their new lives in Australia. In a similar creative vein, selected local community groups, including the Sudanese African Women's Association, supported a community artist to run a series of banner workshops.
- Another innovative Refugee Week activity was Council's **Canterbury Living Library Project**. In partnership with CBMI and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), The *Living Library* involves 'books' of community residents of various ethnicities who 'may have experienced prejudice or negative stereotypes, or are at risk of social exclusion' (City of Canterbury 2009:49). Library patrons are encouraged to 'borrow a living book' for half an hour in order to 'bring together people in one-to-one conversation, encourage understanding and reduce prejudice in our communities' (City of Canterbury 2009, 49).
- Other creative forms of entertainment hosted by Council during Refugee Week included performances by an African soloist and the student choir of Punchbowl Public School. Council also facilitated the **Annual Talent Program** organised by the Rangdhanu Aus-Bangla Society.

To promote awareness within migrant and refugee families, the Canterbury Community Drug Action Team initiated the **Family Harmony – Alcohol and other Drugs Awareness Program**. The program is 'focused on the adverse effects of drug/alcohol use on individuals, families and the community' (Canterbury City Council, 2011: 46) and serves as an early intervention to prevent young people from engaging in risky behaviour. As noted by Council, 'the City of Canterbury is committed to help build a better future for local refugee families' (Canterbury City Council Annual Report 2008 – 2009: 41).

In 2011, then in its fourth year of operation, a new cohort of 12 young people of refugee or CALD backgrounds were given a 'once-in-a-lifetime' (Canterbury City Council 2011: 52)<sup>33</sup> opportunity to attend a 'Snow Camp', where they learned the basics of snowboarding. The program was intended to assist young people,

expand their life experiences; improve social interactions with other young people of similar age; encourage young people to feel more comfortable accessing the Canterbury Youth Centre; and [foster] the develop[ment] [of] their relationships with staff and each other (Canterbury City Council 2011, Annual Report 2010-2011: 52).

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<sup>33</sup> Refer to annual report: <http://www.canterbury.nsw.gov.au/Council/Annual-Report-Policies-Access-to-Information/Annual-Report>

An important initiative is the support for the **Balmain for Refugees<sup>34</sup> (BFR) project**. BFR is a committee of Balmain Uniting Church, and was supported by Council's Multicultural Advisory Committee. The project has two major roles: firstly, to help individuals with failed asylum-seeker applications to apply to the courts for review, and secondly, to write requests to the Minister to intervene on asylum-seekers' behalf, based on compelling new evidence and information that these individuals face torture, imprisonment and/or death in their home countries (Balmain Uniting Church website, 2014). The role more pertinent to the Canterbury refugee community is BFR's concern with the 'increasing number of boat arrivals who are flown to Sydney to settle in the community and know no-one' (Balmain Uniting Church website, 2014).

As can be seen by the range of activities and programs discussed above, isolation is an issue Council is actively seeking to address. Council additionally notes that due to the poor English language skills of a significant proportion of new residents, communication is difficult. To counter this, Council aims to practice communication, engagement and participation strategies using residents' community languages. There currently exists within Canterbury City Council a Language Aid program that selects Council employees who speak community languages. They are trained to interpret council enquiries (City of Canterbury 2014, *Language Aids & Translations*), thereby making Council more accessible to those who are not confident in their English communication skills.

## City of Charles Sturt

The City of Charles Sturt local government area is 9 kilometres from Adelaide's CBD in the Western suburbs. With over 28,000 residents born overseas, 79% of whom originated from non-English-speaking countries, City of Charles Sturt is one of South Australia's most culturally-diverse local governments.<sup>35</sup> Muslim residents make up less than 2% of the Charles Sturt's population; just under one in five Muslims in the LGA hailed from Africa, and at the time of the 2011 Census, half had arrived in the last five years (see Table 1).

As highlighted by Council's Manager, Customer & Community Services (City of Charles Sturt Report, Minutes 14/07/2008: 2), Council supports refugees and CALD residents through the following initiatives:

- Employment of a diversity officer.
- Development of cultural diversity policies.
- Cultural competence training for staff and volunteers.
- Computers supporting 14 community languages and Languages Other than English (LOTE) collections at the library.

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<sup>34</sup> Refer to Balmain for Refugees: <http://balmainchurch.org.au/balmain-for-refugees/>

<sup>35</sup> Refer to population breakdown: <http://profile.id.com.au/charles-sturt/home>

- Programs and activities for newly-arrived residents.
- Homework clubs for young people.
- Participation in the Multicultural Sub-group and Friends of Cheltenham Community Centre.

Council also supports the following events celebrating the diversity of its community:

- Refugee Week
- Harmony Day
- Reconciliation Week
- Aboriginal Youth Expo
- Multicultural Celebration at Cheltenham Community Centre
- Multicultural Festival of South Australia<sup>36</sup>

In relation to the City's CALD community, Council references national research showing economic disadvantage to be increasing in particular parts of the Australian community. In its *Community Plan Theme Documents*, used as 'background information to provide stimulus through the consultation phase of the *Community Plan*'<sup>37</sup>, Council added that the implications of these findings were particularly alarming for the City's recently-arrived refugee, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and low-income single parent residents, given that members of these community groups already faced significant socio-economic disadvantage.

The council developed a *Community Plan* to facilitate its achievement of the City's community vision. The 'comprehensive consultation' which led to its development included consultations with the City's CALD community groups, as well as CALD students at a local school<sup>38</sup>. The most significant issues identified by the participants were the inability to find meaningful employment or realistic volunteering opportunities, and an 'overwhelming feelings of isolation'.

In 2008, Council accepted an offer of funding from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) for a Community Pathways Program: ***Community Pathways for New Arrivals in the City of Charles Sturt***. The CALD groups targeted in the program were residents of African, Afghani, Iranian, Iraqi and Burmese background. The grant funding saw the development of a program for newly-arrived residents in which trained volunteers and volunteer-families in the community were 'matched up with new arrivals to assist them to participate and learn about their community'; 'gain knowledge about... the services available to them'; 'facilitate greater understanding of cultural diversity'; and 'develop a friendship through the sharing of values and experiences'.<sup>39</sup>In 2010, the program saw volunteers assist newly arrived residents from Sudan, the Congo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Burundi, Bhutan, Burma and Liberia. The program's team of volunteers met fortnightly to share experiences, provide support to each other, and develop their skills. To help better understand the individuals they support, in 2010 three members from the Sudanese, Hindu-Bhutanese, and Muslim communities also met with

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<sup>36</sup> Refer to Plans & Strategies: <http://www.charlessturt.sa.gov.au/Plans&Strategies>

<sup>37</sup> Refer to Community Plan: <http://www.charlessturt.sa.gov.au/page.aspx?u=396>

<sup>38</sup> Refer to Community Plan: <http://www.charlessturt.sa.gov.au/page.aspx?u=396>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

volunteers to tell their stories and address misconceptions about their cultures (City of Charles Sturt, Kaleidoscope, Issue 9, December 2010).<sup>40</sup>

In the interest of celebrating and supporting the City's rich CALD and Indigenous communities, in past years Council has employed a Diversity Project Officer. The role of the Project Officer was to assist Council implement programs for Charles Sturt's resident CALD and Indigenous communities in an effort to 'embrace and celebrate the diverse nature of the City of Charles Sturt' (City of City of Charles Sturt Project Monitoring Minutes 17/03/2008).<sup>41</sup> The Diversity Officer participates in committees of the Australian Refugee Association (ARA); African Workers Network; Creative Communities Network (a sub-committee of the Council); ARA Homework Network management committee; and Building Neighbourhood Harmony (a national reference group managed by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to establish a tool-kit for local government to improve understanding of refugees and new migrants).

In past years, Council has held the following activities during Refugee Week:<sup>42</sup>

- In 2008 over 100 participants attended *Multicultural Storytime*. The activity saw residents' stories told in Somali, Arabic, Bosnian, Albanian, Vietnamese and English. Following *Storytime*, participants enjoyed food prepared by the *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Women's Community*, a group that meets regularly at Cheltenham Community Centre. The event also saw the launch of *Library Press Display*, an online repository of world newspapers.
- In 2009 over 150 students and adults again attended *Multicultural Storytime*. The initiative was supported by Pennington Primary School (New Arrival Program), the Islamic College and the Vietnamese Family Day Care Dance Troup. *Multicultural Storytime* was awarded the Jim Crawford Award for Innovation in Libraries. The honour eponymously reflects 'a vision of all people throughout South Australia having access to a free, quality public library network'<sup>43</sup>.
- In 2009, in partnership with Council, the Henley Surf Life Saving Club also organised *On the Same Wave*, an information session attended by 55 young people from small and emerging communities about water safety and surf lifesaving activities.
- In 2011, 130 community members attended Youth Central's *Welcome to the Neighbourhood* event, which included guests from Adelaide Soccer Club and the local police. Participants also enjoyed three performances by young people.

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<sup>40</sup> Refer to Kaleidoscope: <http://www.charlessturt.sa.gov.au/CommunityMagazine>

<sup>41</sup> Refer to City of City of Charles Sturt Project Monitoring Minutes:

<http://www.charlessturt.sa.gov.au/Agendas&Minutes>

<sup>42</sup> Refer to New Arrival and Refugee Program:

<http://www.charlessturt.sa.gov.au/NewArrival&RefugeeProgram>

<sup>43</sup> Refer to New Arrival and Refugee Program:

<http://www.charlessturt.sa.gov.au/NewArrival&RefugeeProgram>

- In 2011, 90 individuals attended *Welcome to Australia*, an event for refugees, asylum seekers, and new immigrants. In 2013 the *Welcome to Australia – Walk Together* event took place.
- In 2011, 90 participants also attended the *Cycle Safe* project held in collaboration with ARA, Neighbourhood House and Council's *OPAL Program*, a program seeking to encourage community members to eat well and be physically active. The project aimed to educate young people of the City's CALD community on bike and road safety, bike maintenance, repairs and road rules. Council notes that feedback from the 20 participants indicated the project to be 'a huge success'.<sup>44</sup>

The City receives funding under the *Australian Government Humanitarian Scheme* for a *New Arrivals Refugee Immunization Clinic*. The Clinic serves to ensure that newly-arrived refugee residents satisfy the requirements of the *Australian National Immunisation Program*. The Clinic operates monthly, and accepts referrals from word-of-mouth, general practitioners, the Migrant Health Service, Child and Youth Health and the Migrant Resource Centre.

In December 2013, the Premier of South Australia signed a pledge of support on behalf of the South Australian Government for The Australian Human Rights Commission's anti-racism campaign, *Racism. It Stops with Me*. The Office of the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity contacted City of Charles Sturt Council to seek its support for the campaign, and in 2014 Council provided a report to its City Services Committee for the purpose of delivering the campaign. One initiative suggested by Council as part of this campaign was to hold three days of workshops or information sessions at two local venues, with one session including a panel of speakers from the refugee/asylum –seeker/ migrant communities.

In acknowledgement of the fact that many young refugees arrive as unaccompanied minors and, at times, with younger siblings in their care, Council's overarching development goal was to provide a forum in which to support them socially as they adjust to their new lives. In 2006 the program was held one night a week and assisted up to 30 12 –17 year-old high-school students. The Council noted that the *Homework Club* led to students' improved 'literacy skills and academic achievement; higher retention of refugees in mainstream secondary schools; stronger social supports; and increased access to resources within the local community, e.g. libraries [and] young people's services' (City of City of Charles Sturt Report 12/06/2007). By December 2007, yet another *Homework Club* developed in partnership with the Western Area Multicultural Young people Services (WAMYS) operated weekly at the City's Youth Central Venue. In 2011 it was noted by Council that the ongoing recruitment of yet more volunteer tutors was made necessary due to the Club's growing popularity throughout the year. The *Homework Club* is still operating.<sup>45</sup>

The following community-based organisations and networks also serve the interests of the City's CALD community:

<sup>44</sup> Refer to Plans & Strategies: <http://www.charlessturt.sa.gov.au/Plans&Strategies>

<sup>45</sup> Refer to: <http://www.charlessturt.sa.gov.au/page.aspx?u=771>

- The Cheltenham Community Centre (CCC) is a key community-based organisation and works collaboratively with local agencies, learning institutes and local government to provide a range of community services (Cheltenham Community Centre, 2014). The Centre is well-used by the African community. CCC notes that, members of the African community - especially those originating from Zimbabwe and Eritrea - represent the majority of new arrivals enjoying the Centre.
- A sub-set of CCC, Friends of Cheltenham Community Centre (FCCC), is composed of CCC's African, Indian and Malaysian members and is a forum for celebrating, sharing and understanding each other's cultures. The forum also acts as an informal advisory group to advise CCC in matters relating to its service provision for Charles Sturt's CALD community. Council notes that the FCCC is 'a key example of a successful consultation and engagement model for the CALD community' (City of City of Charles Sturt Minutes 8/09/2008, pp.6) and that CCC have provided members of the CALD community with 'a real sense of ownership [of the centre] and an increased sense of citizenship in the City of Charles Sturt' (City of Charles Sturt, 8/09/2008, pp.6).
- The Regional Community Services Forum sees the meeting of City of Charles Sturt community service providers for the purposes of networking, sharing information, identifying community needs and service gaps and developing collaboration and partnership opportunities. Council reports that the first meeting, held on 3 March 2014, was successfully received by representatives from state government as well as non-government organisations. The meeting was used for the purpose of seeking service providers' input into the City's *Community Services Strategy*, and allowed service providers the opportunity to relay their concerns and note the service gaps existing in the region. One gap noted in relation to service provision for refugees and new arrivals was that service providers worked 'in isolation rather than in partnership with others'. Another gap highlighted by service providers catering to the City's refugee residents was the lack of 'service delivery for those that arrived as refugees but no longer fit into [the] category'.

## Hume City Council

Hume City Council is partially within the metropolitan area of Melbourne. It includes the outer north-western suburbs and a number of rural localities between 13 and 40 kilometres from Melbourne CBD. It had 167,562 residents in June 2011 of whom 15.9% were Muslim (Table 1). According to the 2011 Census there were 761 African Muslims in the Hume LGA of whom around one in five had arrived in the last 5 years. African Muslims accounted for less than 3% of Hume's Muslim population.

In 2013 Hume City Council embarked on an innovative and ambitious plan to create a new **Multicultural Action Plan (MAP)** to 'improve information, engagement, access and

participation for those of migrant, refugee and multicultural backgrounds'.<sup>46</sup> Residents were invited to offer their comments on the new plan, and the development of the plan saw 700 individuals provide feedback, ideas and comments online through workshops and via face-to-face engagement over a period of five months. Face-to-face engagement included feedback from important CALD networks and groups including the Hume Interfaith Network, Multicultural Workers Network and Multicultural Youth Working Group. The Council mayor identified the following objectives for the four-year plan:

- improve the multicultural community's awareness and access to Council services, with specific strategies to address the needs of the most vulnerable people;
- enhance cultural awareness and relationships throughout Hume City through activities that foster community connections and celebrate cultural diversity; and
- identify and better understand the gaps and opportunities in servicing our culturally and linguistically diverse community.

In 2014 the Hume City Council celebrated Refugee Week by organising the ***Hummus Falafel Refugee Exhibition***. The Exhibition comprised photographs and objects by two community artists, Ahmad Sabra and Zaharah Habibulla. The images depicted refugee camps and the experiences of refugees through conflicts, migration and war. Their stories were captured on camera by Ahmad in his two-year travels over six countries. In congruence with Ahmad's project, Zahara's work reflected the important role objects such as jewellery play in helping owners retain 'a strong resonance of...preciousness, memory, place and belonging'.<sup>47</sup>

Under the Council's Social Justice Framework, Council developed eight *Social Action Plans* in 2007, one of which was the ***One City, Many Cultures Action Plan (MAP)***. These *Social Justice Plans* reflect Council's 'commitment to advancing respect, participation and wellbeing of migrants, refugees and our multicultural community'.<sup>48</sup> A key objective is to 'Foster participation of the multicultural community in the civic life of Hume City'. Council also committed to working with business and job search agencies 'to identify and reduce barriers to employment for migrants and refugees' (Multicultural Action Plan 2014 – 2018, pp. 15). Another objective is to build the capacity of workers in the workplace. In relation to services for refugee youth under the City's ***Youth Strategy***, the Multicultural Youth Working Party specifically 'develops strategies to support young people who are newly-arrived, refugee and humanitarian arrivals'.

## Toowoomba Regional Council

<sup>46</sup> Refer to:

[http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/About\\_Us>Contact\\_Details/Your\\_Council/Media\\_Publications\\_Forms/Media\\_Releases/Media\\_Releases\\_2014/Hume\\_City\\_Council\\_adopts\\_new\\_plan\\_to\\_support\\_cultural\\_diversity](http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/About_Us>Contact_Details/Your_Council/Media_Publications_Forms/Media_Releases/Media_Releases_2014/Hume_City_Council_adopts_new_plan_to_support_cultural_diversity)

<sup>47</sup> Refer to Hume City Council:

[http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/About\\_Us>Contact\\_Details/Your\\_Council/Media\\_Publications\\_Forms/Media\\_Releases/Media\\_Releases\\_2014/Hummus\\_Falafel\\_Refugee\\_exhibition\\_comes\\_to\\_Craigieburn](http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/About_Us>Contact_Details/Your_Council/Media_Publications_Forms/Media_Releases/Media_Releases_2014/Hummus_Falafel_Refugee_exhibition_comes_to_Craigieburn)

<sup>48</sup> Refer to: Refer to Hume City Council:

[http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/About\\_Us>Contact\\_Details/Your\\_Council/Media\\_Publications\\_Forms/Media\\_Releases/Media\\_Releases\\_2014/Hummus\\_Falafel\\_Refugee\\_exhibition\\_comes\\_to\\_Craigieburn](http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/About_Us>Contact_Details/Your_Council/Media_Publications_Forms/Media_Releases/Media_Releases_2014/Hummus_Falafel_Refugee_exhibition_comes_to_Craigieburn)

Toowoomba is a city in the Darling Downs region of Queensland, 125 kilometres west of Brisbane. Toowoomba's population in June 2011 was 151,189. While it has a small Muslim population, the African Muslim population as a proportion of the total Muslim population in the LGA is fairly large (17.5%) and 86% of the African Muslim population arrived in the five years prior to 2011. Despite the small refugee population, Toowoomba offers a large number of services, however the role of local government is limited.

In 2012 the Human Settlement Services (HSS), a branch of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, generated a report of Toowoomba's regional profile: *Humanitarian Settlement Services Regional Profile #14, Toowoomba Queensland*.<sup>49</sup> The profile identifies several forms of support available to refugees resident in the area. Local government, via its appointed multicultural officer, links in with these service providers and thereby facilitates the process of knowledge sharing.

The major service providers in Toowoomba are the HSS and the Multicultural Development Association (MDA). The HSS helps refugees access mainstream services such as Centrelink, Medicare and specialist health services. It also assists with the opening of bank accounts, English language tuition and training and employment. The MDA is a specialist settlement agency working on behalf of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). MDA collaborates with federal, state and local government to provide settlement, employment and welfare services to refugees and migrants in Toowoomba and the greater region.<sup>50</sup> An important function is to help refugee families' access housing.<sup>51</sup>

The Smith Family provides schooling and education engagement support programs for young people of refugee backgrounds, and the Toowoomba Catholic and public schools have programs to help the refugee students settle. The Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE plays an important role in welcoming refugees to the City. It holds a welcoming event for students and their families every semester, provides career guidance and counselling, and in collaboration with the University of Southern Queensland identifies students who may be likely to benefit from higher education. TAFE also provides daytime and evening *Adult Migrant English Program* (AMEP) classes and has home tutor and/or *Distance Provider* schemes for students who are unable to physically attend class. The University of Southern Queensland offers *English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students* (ELICOS) for HSS clients. Following the completion of ELICOS; *English for Academic Purposes* (EAP) I; and EAP II courses, eligible students are eligible to pursue undergraduate studies at the university.

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<sup>49</sup> Refer to *Humanitarian Settlement Services Regional Profile #14, Toowoomba Queensland*: <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/hss-regional-profile-14-toowoomba-queensland>

<sup>50</sup> Refer to Multicultural Development Association: <https://mdaltd.org.au/>

<sup>51</sup> Refer to *Humanitarian Settlement Services Regional Profile #14, Toowoomba Queensland*: <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-services/hss-regional-profile-14-toowoomba-queensland>

A range of innovative health services are offered. In regard to health services, Kobi House at Toowoomba Hospital houses the Office for Refugee Health Queensland and provides all new arrivals with their first medical checks and immunisation. There is also a multicultural mental-health liaison officer, and refugees have access to the *Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma*.

In regard to employment, HSS recognizes that the most viable employment industries for clients are in retail, health and community services, light engineering; and education, with particularly high demand for women and young people in service industries such as food and retail. The abattoir in particular serves as a significant employer of both men and women. An interesting employment initiative is the **Work & Welcome Program**. The program has workers donating a small portion of their salary each fortnight to enable the hiring of an employee of refugee or migrant background in their workplace. *The Work & Welcome Program* was joint winner of the 2014 Premier's Cultural Diversity Award for Education and Training. *The Settlement Lifeskills Orientation Program*,<sup>52</sup> established by MDA, endeavours to give newly-arrived refugees and asylum seekers an understanding of Australian processes and procedures. The program engages participants in a discussion on topics such as Australian law, systems and culture; the health system; family law; accommodation; education; employment; driving; police powers; and managing money. The *Program* has been translated into five different languages, and aims to foster cross-cultural learning and sharing. As the program progresses, one-on-one interactions are held between clients and their case managers and clients and cultural support workers. For young people *Lifeskillz* is also held during school holiday periods and 'provides a safe space for young people to chill, connect and make friends (with some sneaky learning thrown in!)'.<sup>53</sup>

In addition, community organisations in Toowoomba provide the following services

- *The African Communities Inclusion Project* helps people of African background and other nationalities enter the workforce.
- Personnel West, a human resources agency, has an African youth employment worker.
- MDA has held *Youth Employment Forums* for young people of migrant and refugee backgrounds between 15 and 25 years of age in an effort to combat the high unemployment rate. The *Forum* provides an opportunity for participants to meet and network with employers and seek out appropriate career pathways.

In addition, community organisations in Toowoomba provide the following services:

- Lifeline has a range of programs to support newly-arrived refugees and migrants.
- Mercy Community Services organises workshops for new arrivals on topics such as *Raising Teenagers in Australia; Working in Australia: Where are the Rules and Laws?; Parenting Your Children in Australia* and *Children at School in Australia*.<sup>54</sup>
- Volunteers from Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Services (TRAMS) offer support to newly-arrived individuals and families.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Refer to MDA: <https://mdaltd.org.au/settlement/>

<sup>53</sup> Refer to Multicultural Development Association: <https://mdaltd.org.au/>

<sup>54</sup> Refer to Mercy Community Services: <http://family.mercycs.org.au/>

<sup>55</sup> Refer to Toowoomba Refugee & Migrant Support: <http://www.toowoomba.centacare.org.au/our-services/toowoomba-refugee-migrant-support/>

- Toowoomba Regional Council delivers community projects and has an active multicultural program.
- Catholic Social Justice supports new arrivals and ensures positive reception by the community.
- Education Queensland attends community organisation network meetings and seeks to resolve arising issues.
- Services are also offered by the Toowoomba Islamic Society, Toowoomba Baha'i Society, University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Sisters of Charity and Toowoomba International Multicultural Society.

MDA also uses its Brisbane network to provide support to small and emerging communities in Toowoomba. Through such links, members of Toowoomba's Eritrean community were able to establish a connection with members of a sister Eritrean community in Brisbane. The Social Justice Commission, Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba, plays an important role in the provision of settlement services for newly-arrived refugees and asylum seekers. The Commission 'has a long record of advocating for human rights for all people claiming asylum in Australia', and operates by combining 'research with advocacy and action'.<sup>56</sup> The Diocese was part of the founding group that in 2004 established the *Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support* (TRAMS), a service which helps newly-arrived individuals settle into the community. This organisation is still active. As noted by the Social Justice Commission 'hundreds of people are welcomed to TRAMS each month', and a range of settlement programs thereafter are delivered by a group of volunteers to newly-arrived residents.<sup>57</sup> Toowoomba Regional Council facilitates the running of the annual Toowoomba Languages and Cultures Festival<sup>58</sup>. The festival celebrates the diversity within the region.

## Townsville City Council

Townsville, population 174,462 in June 2011, is on the north-eastern coast of Queensland, 1,355 kilometres from Brisbane. Less than one per cent of the population are Muslim. However what is noteworthy is that African Muslims constitute just under a third of all Muslim residents and about four in five arrived in the five years preceding 2011.

In its *Community Plan 2011–2021*, Council identified the chronic lack of affordable housing and high unemployment among recently-arrived refugee and migrants, as well as the residents of the City's existing CALD and Indigenous communities, as major concerns.<sup>59</sup> In addition, Council noted that the settlement of recent migrant arrivals on the city's urban fringes placed further pressure on human services such as health, education, family and community support, cultural development, recreation and public safety. It also made it more difficult to provide the infrastructure necessary to provide services. The issues identified by community members

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<sup>56</sup> Refer to Social Justice Commission: <http://www.tsjc.org/>

<sup>57</sup> Refer to Social Justice Commission: <http://www.tsjc.org/>

<sup>58</sup> Toowoomba Languages and Cultures Festival: <http://www.toowoombarc.qld.gov.au/community-services/groups-support-services/multicultural-services>

<sup>59</sup> Refer to Townsville City Council Community Plan: <http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/council/publications/communityreports/pages/default.aspx>

included, amongst others, the provision of cultural services which reflect cultural diversity and needs, and which ensure equity of access.<sup>60</sup>

Townsville City Council's **Community Grants and Sponsorship Scheme** is used to support its multicultural community through the funding of community projects. Such projects, including major community events, are used to encourage the City's CALD residents to actively participate in the Townsville community.<sup>61</sup>

Council's **Multicultural Strategic Action Plan 2011 – 2014** offered the following *Community Grants and Sponsorship Scheme* snapshot of multicultural projects and activities.<sup>62</sup>

- *Declare Townsville a Refugee Welcome Zone*: an initiative by Townsville Multicultural Support Group's Cultural Outreach to Schools Project;
- Costumes for performance: Spirit of Africa Cultural Association;
- Employing Indigenous and multicultural presenters to deliver workshops on their culture and traditions. The Council supported the Cootharinga Society of North Queensland,<sup>63</sup>
- Supplying sewing machine and instruments for *Continuing the Sudanese Culture* event:

Acknowledging Townsville's increasing refugee population, Council offered a sponsorship valued at \$15,000 (over a period of five years) to translate and distribute *Welcome to Townsville* kits to members of the CALD community. The **Information and Brochures Translation Project** was intended to 'assist new and emerging CALD community members to understand [how to] access services, facilities and support in the Townsville Local Government Area' (Townsville City Council 2014, Initiatives in the Spotlight – no longer available on Council website). The priority languages for 2014/2015 were Congolese, Sudanese, Burmese and Chinese, and over the course of the five-year project four priority languages were to be translated in each financial year.

During the 2011/12 financial year, *Council Discretionary Funds* were also granted to the Soroptimist International Club of Townsville to integrate two Somali high school students of refugee background into the community through a local soccer competition.<sup>64</sup> As listed in *Townsville City Council's Child Care Options Handbook* the Inclusion Support Agency North Queensland, with funding from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, ensures that children from CALD backgrounds, including refugee children, had 'access to quality inclusion support that is relevant, appropriate and timely for all eligible child care services in our region'.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Refer to Townsville City Council Community Plan:  
<http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/council/publications/communityreports/pages/default.aspx>

<sup>61</sup> Refer to Townsville City Council's *Community Grants and Sponsorship Scheme*:  
<http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/community/grants/Pages/community.aspx>

<sup>62</sup> Refer to Townsville City Council Action Plans: [www.townsville.qld.gov.au/community/actionplans](http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/community/actionplans)

<sup>63</sup> Refer to Cootharinga Society of North Queensland: <http://www.cootharinga.org.au/>

<sup>64</sup> Refer to Townsville annual report:  
<http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/council/publications/corporate/Pages/annualreports.aspx>

<sup>65</sup> Refer to *Townsville City Council's Child Care Options Handbook*:  
<http://www.townsville.qld.gov.au/community/families/Pages/default.aspx>

## Discussion

This section drew on available council electronic material to outline activities, programs and services provided for refugees and CALD residents. Although the focus initially was on scoping programs specifically for African Muslim refugees we soon realised that to confine the review to this would yield very little data. The scoping found that all the councils were running and or sponsoring a number of programs specifically for refugees and newly arrived migrants, but none were specifically orientated to the African Muslim population. The seven councils reviewed are all engaging in activities, programs and services targeting refugees and CALD residents generally. They were active participants in the Refugee Welcome Zone initiative and made significant efforts to highlight the experiences of their refugees communities by undertaking and or supporting specific cultural and religious diversity events to be actively enjoyed by the whole community.

Globally, in advanced economies, there has been a dramatic increase in what has been termed 'superdiversity' (Vertovec 2007). High immigration levels have greatly increased the diversity of council areas. The term 'super-diversity' has been coined to describe a condition where diversity may mean over one hundred nationalities, but also a diversity of legal statuses, of socioeconomic conditions and a greater diversity in how people choose to live and define themselves. Whereas previous human mobility was primarily labour related, superdiversity is characterised by movement for a range of reasons – refugees seeking asylum, individuals and families escaping instability and increasing poverty and inequality in many countries (Blommaert 2013). Besides mobility and diversity, two additional features of superdiversity are complexity and unpredictability (Blommaert 2013: 5). The councils reviewed illustrate the challenge of service provision within communities characterised by superdiversity. The local governments examined have put in place a range of innovative programs and supports to facilitate the settlement of refugees and CALD communities in their LGAs. As mentioned, the vast majority of programs do not target one specific group. Rather the programs endeavour to encourage collaboration between communities.

The scoping found the larger councils with substantial CALD populations are able to put in place a greater number of programs and events. For example, the City of Charles Sturt in South Australia facilitates a number of events celebrating the diversity of its community whilst also offering more targeted supports to young refugees such as facilitating homework clubs and organising youth specific events. Auburn, Bankstown and Canterbury City Councils have the resources to put in place a number of programs. The smaller councils tend to rely more on outside agencies to provide services. They work on partnership often offering small amounts of funding to community development organisations to run specific events or provide specific services as seen when Townsville City Council offered up to \$15,000 in funding to translate relevant council documents.

A major issue faced by all the councils is that a key issue impacting on the smooth settlement of refugees is the difficulty in obtaining employment. Although some councils have programs in place, this is clearly an issue which is beyond the control of local government. Housing is another important issue. Some refugee households find themselves in inadequate and unaffordable accommodation. Again, the capacity of local government to resolve housing issues is often limited particularly in locations where there is a long waiting period for social housing.

All the councils have signed up for Refugee Week. This remains a key initiative and does illustrate the goodwill of local government and their determination to make their CALD communities feel welcome.

## 4. The problems refugee and CALD communities face and the initiatives of local government to address these

This section presents a summary of the semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with six council personnel from locations across Australia. All of the interviewees were working with refugee communities as multicultural liaison workers, community development workers or as settlement grant program officers within councils. The identities and location of the participants were withheld to enable an open discussion of service provision within the councils concerned.

### Helping new arrivals settle and feel comfortable

All the interviewees commented that the refugee groupings in their LGAs experienced a range of problems and challenges. Paula, a council community development officer in Sydney, outlined some of the problems:

From our perspective they face a lot of issues ... from homelessness to unemployment. We find that they are highly represented in youth unemployment ... They also represent a lot of our vulnerable groups when it comes to looking for housing ... The five year settlement period isn't enough to help them settle into the country. I mean they get given maybe 510 hours of English literacy support through NAVITAS and some other providers, however they rarely complete the 510 hours because they need to live and to make money and to be able to afford to you know live basically and look after their families, particularly if they have children or elderly people they're caring for. So it can make it very difficult to you know get just language literacy going let alone the literacy and then how to utilise mainstream services. So they really get thrown into the deep end and if they can't swim, tough luck basically.

The interviewees agreed that most councils with refugee and CALD communities had a strong awareness of the need to engage with the diverse communities in their LGAs in a positive and sensitive manner. Aisha, a community development officer in suburban Victoria, told of how her council provided 'cultural competency training' to all new council staff to provide an understanding of refugees and CALD communities. A common approach of councils was to work closely with immigrant/migrant specific organisations and groups and provide support where they can. There was consensus that Council did not target particular communities but rather supported events and provided spaces to enable multicultural collaborations. As Lorna, a multicultural officer in a Sydney council, noted,

We are not funded to provide settlement services or any humanitarian work with refugees really, but we hold assets, we maintain assets, community assets and I think it is one way we can assist these new groups to you know get established, to get more sustainable, more self-sufficient and so on. So that's I think that's how we see our role. More of a catalyst and enabler ... We're not here to provide direct services.

Yuvisthi, a multicultural officer in a suburban South Australian council, observed that when trying to engage with the Somali community she found 'they came when we provided them a

space in one of our community centres so that they could call it a home place'. By working in partnership with community organisations and NGOs, councils were able to run more events and attract higher attendance within multicultural communities for targeted initiatives and campaigns in particular for events such as Refugee Week. Lorna, working as a multicultural officer in a Sydney council outlined the types of activities and events organised in partnership.

Yes, we run a lot of cultural events and ... We run multicultural festivals where you know a lot of refugee groups perform or take part in the street parade for instance. We also often form working groups with specific communities to deliver information sessions on let's say domestic violence, or safety, or family issues, intergenerational issues. We've done [this] with the Bengalis and with some African groups and so on. We do form these partnerships, strategy partnerships you know with groups and with service providers, with immigrant support group mainly but also occasionally with ... Transcultural Mental Health or Medicare Local or Local Health District and so on to deliver information, targeted information to specific groups.

Having elected officials 'visibly' engaging with new communities was seen as being significant. Steven, a cultural diversity officer in a local government council in regional Queensland, outlined the impact of this, in his LGA:

This day our mayor he came and our councillors they came just to show that they are here and talked about the importance of being at a Multicultural Day and people coming from a multicultural background ... This has actually made the community bigger and more strong. So this is a good thing for the council to do.

A key mechanism for easing the settlement of new arrivals is the provision of information. This took a range of forms. Much of it involved steering people in the right direction as Aisha working in suburban Melbourne outlined:

Often a role of local government is around information sharing and facilitating networking between different partners. So you know providing that forum where people can come together and figure out who does what and how they [CALD and refugee communities] can seek help and where they can get more information from. It's not rocket science but it provides a really valuable working tool for people working in a different space. What really stuck out for me in this forum for example was, a teacher got up, she said, "I'm pregnant .I don't know if I'm dealing with children who have had their vaccinations. Am I in danger of catching measles for my unborn child?' So a huge impact on how she was relating to these children in her classroom and very fearful so we had someone from the Migration Transport Centre in the room that could just say, 'Yeah. They're all vaccinated'.

Imparting information on health related issues is a common practice as Lorna working in suburban Sydney as a multicultural officer explained:

We've got a maternal and child health services that you know work you know in a very tailored way with particular communities. So we can at times employ bilingual staff to deliver some of the session ...

Interviewees made reference to the community grants for which organisations could apply for. Whilst small, often a maximum of \$20,000, the grants can be used for ‘information sharing or for cultural events’. Interviewees felt that amounts awarded were usually too small to have much impact. Aisha suggested that African communities should consider establishing an umbrella organisation which would give them greater influence in grant applications and lobbying on specific issues. Council workers also voiced their frustration with the amount of bureaucracy involved when applying for funding from the Commonwealth government. Kathleen, a community development officer working in suburban Victoria, commented,

We looked for three years. We managed to get \$200,000 out of the Federal Government to run the Settlement Program within Council which was damn awesome but we didn't get it the next time we reapplied and I frankly gave up trying to get the money. It was so hard. And we were delivering in a very hard different way and what really annoyed me, they used us as an example and a template of how to set up different ways to deliver but when we tried to get the money the second time they wouldn't give it to us.

### Assisting individuals and communities deal with government bureaucracy

Dealing with Centrelink and local government bureaucracy represented a major challenge for refugee and CALD communities. The lack of English language proficiency made it difficult for communities, particularly African refugee communities, to access relevant policies and services and for many refugees the role and functions of local government were opaque. Also, there was a lack of clarity about what their rights were. Aisha, a council worker in a suburban Sydney LGA, noted refugees from African communities ‘have been denied any civil rights back in their countries so when they come here they don't know what rights they have’. Not having English competency, Aisha noted creates a number of problems

That then leads to problems about people being able to advocate for themselves and communicate and access services so it makes navigating the system very difficult.

A key role of the council workers interviewed was to facilitate refugees' interaction with the government bureaucracy. The interviewees commented that they were often the first point of contact for refugees endeavouring to navigate government services. Steven working in regional Queensland explained his role in the following way:

People who are from refugee backgrounds they can actually come to the council and ask to have an appointment with me and we can go over if they have any type of problems. So we do the case work and most of the problems if I can solve it by myself that's fine. If not, I will refer them to another organisation so they can help them. The main point of the program is to actually help them to become independent so they can actually access the mainstream service by themselves.

Steven also ran information sessions on various topics.

We run ... information sessions about different topics which is you know very important for them. Like how to access Centrelink, driving rules, sometimes immigration. Like the last information session was about family reunion. If you have family overseas [and] you would like to bring them to Australia, so what you can do?

He had used his knowledge of the local bureaucratic processes to facilitate the building of a mosque.

We are approached by the Muslim community here because they would like to build their mosque so that's why they're having the problem. You know what are the procedures and how we can get approval? ... And they consult with the multicultural officer to help them with anything ... [We] ... try to give them a good understanding of what they need [to do], to be able to build [a] ... mosque ... So we have the service but this service is not for a target group. This service is for anyone from any community. It doesn't matter if he's a Muslim or he's another religion or from an African background.

Endeavouring to get the bureaucracy to be more accommodating and aware of the issues facing refugee and CALD communities was a major focus for the council personnel interviewed. Yuvisthi who works in council in South Australia that has experienced a substantial wave of migration, commented,

... My role for the last 10 years is that cultural diversity, cultural awareness type of stuff ... It's about getting people and the systems to change rather than just always delivering a thing if you know what I mean.

In some cases the sensitivity of a council towards their refugee populations was heightened by the experiences of their elected representatives:

I think our council [representatives] are wonderfully diverse and they are really well connected to the community which keeps us on our toes as bureaucrats. (Kathleen)

In one of the councils, a councillor had been a refugee and thus appreciated the difficulties these communities faced.

We've got a councillor ..... and he actually fled from the killing fields in Cambodia so he's you know a refugee himself. His story is very powerful and it is often told (Aisha).

For council workers having access to accurate data as to the profile of the refugee community within a local government area was viewed as crucial as a clear picture would facilitate the optimal targeting of services. Kathleen, a council community development worker in suburban Melbourne, commented,

For us, and I've certainly heard other councils report on this, it is often around getting good data from the government about who is in our community and their visa status and who the next wave will be ... But it has been a real struggle to get hold of some of those demographics and we know this council takes a large percentage of recent arrivals ... A lot ... of people have been released into the communities by government where council and service providers weren't necessarily prepared for that.

## Housing

The lack of affordable housing was identified as a major issue in most LGAs. Yuvisthi told of the problems the Somali and Sudanese communities in her LGA faced.

Yeah, we have a large Somali population ... so one of the reasons they still come to the west is we have ... cheaper housing, nowhere near as much as we've had in the past. Housing SA which manages our State housing system ... are either selling off the stock, knocking it down and rebuilding and when they rebuild they take no notice of the client's needs or wishes and build something that no one can fit into. So the last Somali families are struggling big time to find suitable housing as are the large Sudanese families ... We have at least 15 if not 20 different African groups

Kathleen mentioned that her council recently held a forum with CALD service providers. Housing affordability emerged as the major issue:

One of the top issues that was reported at this forum was finances and housing being big concerns and specifically the lack of quality and supply of housing followed very closely and tied in with financial pressure and the difficulty and stress this leads to.

Another council worker in suburban Melbourne, also highlighted the housing issue.

We have about 110,000 residents of whom over 25% speak another language other than English at home so it is very multicultural ... We have a Somali population ... So the Somali families are struggling big time to find suitable housing as are the large Sudanese families ... (Aisha)

She felt that the lack of affordable housing options for refugee communities 'leads to a whole range of mental health issues'.

Paula based in a suburban Sydney council commented that homelessness was an issue due to the lack of affordable accommodation options within her council area. The interviewees felt that they there was little they could do in this area. Working in partnership with other councils was seen as a good way to lobby for change. As Aisha explained, her suburban Melbourne council did not provide housing but part of the council's role was to work with other local councils in advocating for the need for affordable housing for asylum seekers and refugees.

Yeah, we're not a provider of house services ourselves .. but we certainly have an advocacy component and we often work with other local governments around you know forming a joint statement for example around asylum seekers issues because it is one thing for one council to make a call to government it is always you know the more voices that you can have it makes it a stronger bid

## Employment and Education

Council personnel agreed that there was a great need to support African communities in particular with schooling, training and employment pathways. Education and training was

viewed as a key focus. Aisha outlined the challenges for the South Sudanese refugee community in her LGA in suburban Melbourne:

I know that the story with South Sudan was you went to school when you needed to. So if your village was very heavily involved in agriculture you may not have gone to school until you are 18 because you might have been working in the fields. So to come to a country where we have a [school] system that starts at the age of five and you're 18 and you should be in with a five year old because you're learning what a five-year-old is learning [is difficult].

Council workers were working with schools to improve links and provide English language support classes via library services and events. Steven working in regional Queensland, told of how his council runs homework classes.

And we do also homework class programs with the kids who are from a refugee background ... We help them do their homework after the school.

Finding employment opportunities for young migrants and refugees was seen as crucial, however it was often beyond the capacity of the local government concerned. Paula outlined what her council in suburban Sydney was doing to help refugees into employment:

We recently completed a youth employment program to help refugee and migrant youth in regards to accessing employment pathways and education pathways so this program specifically works on supporting the soft skill development. Things around eye contact and the way to handle an interview or react within a work situation. Because a lot of them may get a job but they have struggles with maintaining a job. So what we do is we workshop them so that they're clear to go on our web page and just access the tools we have provided for them so they've got access to being able to build cover letters or industry specific cover letters like for example industry such as construction, retail, telecommunication, banking and hospitality which are some of the areas which are still hiring people ... So they can go in there and make cover letters or just build a resume and it is a one page resume which is all formatted for them.

English proficiency was viewed as essential for finding employment. However, council workers recognised the challenges newly arrived refugees faced in completing English language classes that were provided. Undertaking initiatives to support English language learning was viewed as important. Kathleen is based in a suburban Melbourne council. She outlined an innovative program that involves the council working with parents and children. The program has been running for four years.

It is focused on early years hubs in schools and very much looking at connecting families through their children into learning programs so it might have bilingual story time and then part of that story will be in the language of the participants, part of it will be in English ... It is around creating a learning pathway for those getting children school ready, but also using the forum [to encourage] ... women to participate in learning

English as well. For anyone who has recently arrived is the target audience and that's the only criterion at this point in time.

Creating opportunities for refugees to network and to develop business collaborations was seen as one way for refugees to establish business opportunities. Lorna, a council worker in suburban Sydney, commented,

So groups need assistance from Council in accessing resources and facilities ... There's a lot of pressure on council to provide facilities for these groups in an equitable way so they can form associations, they can meet regularly or they can organise their own celebrations which you know assist them in integrating ... and finding their way through the Australian systems and so on.

## Discussion & Conclusion

The initial focus of this exploratory study was to review the support provided by local government for African Muslim refugees. However the review of the councils illustrated that very few local government initiatives catered specifically for this grouping. Therefore the focus expanded to cover programs for African refugees and refugees in general. It is evident that most refugees find settling in Australia enormously challenging. Flatau, *et al.* (2014) conclude that it usually takes between 10 to 15 years for refugees to become 'successfully' and 'fully' resettled and integrated into Australia., however the supports that are provided to address the resettlement needs of newly-arrived humanitarian entrants are limited to five years from their arrival. The resettlement experiences of refugees, in particular those fleeing war-torn environments and persecution, are particularly challenging and the research is clear in stressing the need for governments and service providers in particular to be aware of the diversity of refugee needs (Colic-Peisker and Tilbury, 2007).

It is clear that the local governments reviewed have put in place a range of innovative programs and supports to facilitate the settlement of refugees and CALD communities in their LGAs. However, it is a difficult task. Superdiversity adds to the challenge. The council personnel interviewed recognise the complexities of the African communities within their council areas noting that refugees from a particular country were often differentiated and there were a number of different groupings. This 'superdiversity' of immigrants within council areas means that the vast majority of programs do not target one specific group, rather the programs endeavour to encourage collaboration between communities.

Council workers were acutely aware of the difficulties refugees had settling, in particular those fleeing war-torn environments and persecution. They highlighted a number of issues such as the lack of formal education and English competency deemed to be major issues. This made it hard for new arrivals to navigate the bureaucracy or find employment. The lack of affordable and suitable housing was another major concern highlighted. This created enormous stress for the households concerned. Another key issue is unemployment. The lack of employment is a source of intense frustration.

These are all complex structural issues that local governments have little power to influence. However, there is no doubt that the multicultural workers employed are doing a crucial job in helping these communities find their way. The instability of short-term work was a clear source of frustration for interviewees. Council workers were also concerned about the introduction of rate capping and how it could potentially impact any future services or support from councils with a large number of CALD communities. The interviewees felt that in order to achieve the most effective community development outcomes it is essential that LGAs continue to have funding for multicultural officers.

A major limitation that local governments have in regards to assisting refugee and CALD communities is a lack of resources. Steven expressed frustration with the short-term nature of funding available for multicultural workers within Queensland. In Queensland a partnership between the Queensland Government and local government saw the introduction of the Local Area Multicultural Partnership Program (LAMP)<sup>66</sup> where 13 council areas were funded under the initiative which commenced in 2012. Funding was provided to cover half the salary of a multicultural officer position with local government funding the other half. However, on the 1 July 2015 the scheme was shelved. Steven noted that a regional council with a significant refugee population in the locality were not supporting the multicultural officer who was funded via the LAMP scheme position after the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2015.

Kathleen, a community development worker in suburban Victoria, outlined how her job and role was constantly being altered which was causing some concern,

I find that my role is constantly changing so I don't know whether I should be starting to worry about that. They were even saying that they wanted to change the title of my role to have it like community development officer, but I'm fighting that we keep the cultural diversity [in the title] because it is kind of like signals that the commitment is there. I think it is more sustainable.

She was also concerned that rate capping could impact on the services provided in councils with a large number of CALD communities. In Victoria, rate capping will be introduced at the start of the 2016-17 financial year any rate increase will not be able to exceed the inflation rate.

Stage two of this research will involve interviewing key African representatives and refugee advocates in different communities. It will also involve in-depth interviews with African residents who initially entered Australia on humanitarian visas to assess how they perceive local government initiatives and what they feel needs to be done. A crucial focus will be to investigate what services are provided, how these services are perceived and what they feel the gaps are.

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<sup>66</sup> Local Area Multicultural Partnership Program (LAMP) refer to:  
<https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/multicultural/programs-and-initiatives/local-area-multicultural-partnerships-lamp-program>

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