

Comments from the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory for the *Evolving Darwin* Discussion Paper



Issue 5: Cohesive Community

5.2 Culture

5.2.1 Promote and support activities that celebrate cultural diversity

The Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT), based in the multicultural hub of suburban Malak, is the peak local community-based organisation dedicated to advocacy for the interests, concerns and aspirations of migrants and refugees.

Over a number of years our organisation has organised events and activities that celebrate the cultural diversity of our city and foster inclusion and acceptance within and between the new and emerging migrant and refugee communities, Indigenous groups and established wider Australian community.

The following is a list of activities with which the MCNT is involved that celebrate cultural diversity in Darwin. We would welcome the involvement of Darwin City Council in future years to broaden the outreach and enhance the profile of these activities.

1. *CulturFest*

The MCNT in partnership with another Malak based agency Darwin Community Arts (DCA) have recently initiated a cultural celebration known as *CulturFest*. Our vision for *CulturFest* is a 'multicultural festival' owned by the Malak neighbourhood: an event for the wider community of Darwin to experience the richness of cultural diversity through music, film, foods, arts and crafts, and performance.

In September 2007 the MCNT and DCA (then known as Brown's Mart Community Arts) presented the inaugural *CulturFest* in the Malak shopping centre. This event was such an outstanding success with demonstrated community support that the MCNT and DCA have decided to schedule *CulturFest* as an annual event in the late dry season.

CulturFest in 2007 had two components: *Bringing Africa to Darwin* on Saturday afternoon 22nd September and *Celebrating our Diversity* on Sunday afternoon 23rd September.

Bringing Africa to Darwin organised by DCA with Darwin's African community, celebrated the contribution that countries from the African continent have made to Darwin. The program was opened by Arts Minister the Hon Marion Scrymgour MLA and featured displays of hair braiding, henna painting, a display of artefacts from different countries, traditional dances, and a fashion parade in the Chambers Crescent Theatre, with food stalls in the MCNT Community Room.

Celebrating our Diversity organised by the MCNT, showcased the broader cultural diversity of Darwin and the diverse and vibrant communities which live and work together. The program in the Malak Shopping Centre Breezeway was opened by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs the Hon Paul Henderson MLA and featured cultural displays, food stalls and performances from a range of community groups. The finale was a screening of short films from a variety of countries in Chambers Crescent Theatre.

CulturFest in 2008 was staged in the Malak Shopping Centre car park on Saturday afternoon 20th September and was opened by the Member for Karama the Hon Delia Lawrie MLA. The program featured cultural performances from a range of community groups, a humorous and heartfelt Larrakia welcome from Ali Mills, a recital of Greek and English poetry and Reggae Dave with his set of folk and reggae tunes.

The event also featured Neighbourhood Watch 'cars for kids', a face-painting stall and ethnic food stalls. In the evening there was an outdoor cinema in the car park featuring a documentary produced by the Darwin branch of the Australian Red Cross and the 2008 Refugee Film Festival as well as an under 18s dance party in Chambers Crescent Theatre.

We are establishing the foundations for *CulturFest* to become larger and better resourced each year and to achieve in time the status of one of the premier 'multicultural' festivals in northern Australia and quite distinct from other existing festivals in Darwin.

The MCNT would welcome in kind and financial support from Darwin City Council for *CulturFest* in future years that will directly assist us as organisers to utilise the shared public space and infrastructure of Malak; enable our ethnic community groups through adequate recompense to showcase their artistic and cultural traditions; and effectively promote the event through various media. The MCNT will apply to the second round of the 2008-09 Darwin City Council Community Grants Program for funding towards this event.

The MCNT and DCA are committed to developing social enterprises and revitalising the local economy. As our agencies see it, there are a number of identifiable immediate and long-term sustainable benefits for the Council, our Malak neighbourhood and the wider community of Darwin from Darwin City Council's involvement in *CulturFest*. The MCNT and DCA are investigating future funding possibilities with various federal and NT government and philanthropic agencies; and it is envisaged that an arts/culture based project will be developed as part of *CulturFest 2009*. In the future we will further explore options for supporting and developing the skills of talented local multicultural artists and performers.

Recommendation: The MCNT is inviting Darwin City Council to be an event partner and sponsor for *CulturFest* at this exciting stage of its development.

2. Harmony Day

Harmony Day on 21st March each year is a nation-wide opportunity for local communities to bring Australians from all backgrounds together in a positive and productive way. On Harmony Day we celebrate the success of Australia's cultural and religious diversity; to re-commit to our shared values of respect and acceptance; and to promote the social and economic benefits of multiculturalism.

On Harmony Day each year Australians from all backgrounds are encouraged to take part in the celebrations: to show their support for community harmony, and to say 'no' to racism. Harmony Day provides Australians a great opportunity to get to know each other and reflect on how we collectively and individually accept difference and value diversity.

From its inception in 1999, Harmony Day has been supported by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and has evolved over the years to become Australia's largest multicultural event. In the week of Harmony Day across Australia there are always a multitude of activities and events.

The concept of Harmony Day takes on a special resonance in the Northern Territory, and is celebrated throughout the entire month of March. For a number of years the Northern Territory Government through the Office of Multicultural Affairs has provided significant grant funding to schools, ethnic community organisations, service providers, and local councils for harmony based activities. The Northern Territory Government also hosts a high profile Harmony Day civic reception at Parliament House each year.

The MCNT proudly supports multiculturalism and has a tradition of involvement in Harmony Day celebrations that involves its friends, stakeholders, clients and members and is planned to outreach to the general community. The MCNT also places advertisements specifically promoting these events in two annual Harmony Day Special Features: in the *Darwin/Palmerston Sun* and in the *Northern Territory News*.

On Tuesday 21st March 2006, the MCNT hosted a free Harmony Day Lunch for the general community at the Learning Space Foyer at the Palmerston Campus of Charles Darwin University. This activity was part of the MCNT's "Palmerston City Interfaith Network" funded by DIAC as a *Living in Harmony* Initiative. Charles Darwin University provided the venue free of charge by arrangement as part of its Community Engagement Program.

The event drew 120 people from a diverse range of cultures, faiths and ages from the Top End community and the audience included a number of new citizens from a ceremony at Palmerston City Council that morning as well as staff from the Darwin Office of DIAC. Guest speakers on the program included (then) Alderman Dorothy Fox, the (then) Mayor of Palmerston Mrs Annette Burke, Mr David Tollner (then) Member for Solomon, and Senator Trish Crossin. The program included awards for local primary school children for the 'Golden Rule' poster competition as well as great multicultural entertainment.

On Friday evening, 23rd March 2007 the MCNT hosted a free Harmony Day Soirée for the general community at the MCNT Community Room in Malak. The event drew 80 people from a diverse range of cultures, faiths and ages from the Top End community and the audience included staff from Darwin office of Dept of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

Guest speakers on the program included (then) Alderman Dorothy Fox, the (then) Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Hon. Delia Lawrie MLA, Dr Christine Fletcher, President of United Nations Associations of Australia - NT Division, and Ms Annette Ellis from Nhulunbuy Rotary Club. The program included multicultural entertainment and also served as a launch "Fair Go" television advertisement campaign of Phil O'Brien and the Nhulunbuy Rotary Club funded by DIAC as a *Living in Harmony* Project.

For 2009, the MCNT in partnership with other Malak based service providers are planning for a series of youth-focused events to celebrate Harmony Day. The YWCA, as part of its Brotherz Program funded by DIAC as a *Community Relations* Project will be coordinating two events on Friday evening 20th and Saturday 21st March.

On Friday evening 20th March the 'Movies and Mocktails in Moving Malak' Harmony Day activity will feature a Harmony Day Short Film Festival. Young people will then be invited to make their own pizzas and mocktails whilst listening to local youth musicians play in Chambers Crescent Theatre. Transport will be provided enabling young people everyone to join in the night. On Saturday 21st March the 'Malak Seating/Youth Art Project' will be launched with an art mosaicing of straw bale seating in the public space of the Malak Shopping Centre commenced as a youth led project during the weekends of March (Harmony Month) leading up to Harmony Day. There will also be a display of youth art in various media in the foyer of Chambers Crescent Theatre.

On Sunday 22nd March the MCNT with other local partners and stakeholders including Malak Neighbourhood Watch, the Africa-Australia Friendship Association and Danila Dilba Youth Services is planning a “Bridging the Gap” social soccer match between the Police and local youth at the Malak Oval.

Recommendation 1: The MCNT invites Darwin City Council to initiate and promote a tradition of staging an annual high profile civic reception on Harmony Day.

Recommendation 2: The MCNT invites Darwin City Council’s active involvement such as the attendance of the Lord Mayor of Darwin and/or Aldermen for these Harmony Day activities in March 2009.

3. International Women’s Day

International Women’s Day (IWD) is an occasion celebrated by women’s groups around the world on 8th March each year. This date is also commemorated at the United Nations and is designated in many countries as a national holiday. The Charter of the United Nations, signed in 1945, was the first international agreement to proclaim gender equality as a fundamental human right. The United Nations has helped create internationally agreed legislation, strategies, standards, programs and goals to advance the status of women worldwide and to transform women’s interactions and relationships in society.

Throughout the world the 8th March is a time to celebrate change and is a global day that connects all women around the world and inspires them to achieve their full potential. IWD is the story of ordinary and extraordinary women as makers of history; it is rooted in the centuries-old struggle of women to shape a society that increases opportunities and widens choices by working together and to claim the same rights and privileges as men. IWD celebrates emancipation and equality and provides the opportunity to reflect on the gains that women have made to improve society in the past, present and future.

In Darwin, the IWD Dinner with a multicultural theme has been organised by the MCNT for the past decade and is the MCNT’s best known annual signature event. It is a key date in the social calendar for Darwin women and provides the opportunity to recognise that Darwin’s women as community leaders, role models and mentors, have made and continue to make a difference. The IWD Dinner also provides the opportunity for local women, particularly from migrant and refugee backgrounds, to develop networks and facilitate partnerships with the broader community.

In 2007 the IWD Dinner was held at the Sky City Casino Ballroom on Thursday 8th March 2008. The Dinner was a sell-out, with more than 150 people attending, including the Hon Clare Martin MLA the (then) Chief Minister, and the Hon Delia Lawrie, (then) Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Professor Helen Garnett, Vice-Chancellor of Charles Darwin University was the key note speaker. ABC journalist Naomi Edwards was the MC and there were multicultural performers on the program.

For the 2008 and 2009 IWD Dinners the MCNT has formed a partnership with the NT Anti-Discrimination Commission (NTADC) to plan the event. In 2008 the IWD Dinner was held at the Italian Club on Saturday 8th March. The event drew a diverse crowd of more than 300 people including some supportive men. The event was a huge success, with everyone enjoying the cultural performances, inspiring speeches, good company and delicious food. The Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Women’s Policy, the Hon Marion Scrymgour MLA, was the key note speaker.

The MCNT and NTADC are planning for the IWD Dinner on Saturday 7th March 2009 and have applied to the first round of the 2008-09 Darwin City Council Community Grants Program for funding towards this event.

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils (FECCA) and the Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (ECCWA) are holding a multicultural-focussed conference *Refugee and Immigrant Women: Setting the Social Inclusion Agenda* to coincide with the celebration of International Women's Day in Perth on Friday 6th and Saturday 7th March, 2009. This inaugural IWD Conference will bring together researchers, practitioners, policy makers, community members and organisations and it is expected that up to 350 people will attend. The ECCWA has been contacting the relevant state and territory government Multicultural agencies throughout Australia to lobby for sponsored assistance for local CALD women delegates to attend.

- The flyer for the IWD Conference is attached with this submission.

Recommendation 1: The MCNT would welcome Darwin City Council's active involvement as an event partner and sponsor for the International Women's Day Dinner in future years.

Recommendation 2: The MCNT invites Darwin City Council to consider sponsorship of two women delegates to attend the IWD Conference in Perth in March 2009.

5.2.3 Develop community education programs and activities that celebrate diversity

The MCNT believes that cross-cultural and interfaith awareness and education programs, particularly when focussed on young people, are essential to preparing our future global citizens and peacemakers to develop empathy and compassion, an understanding of difference, and an acceptance of diversity.

Over the years the MCNT has developed productive working relationships with local schools, and has been involved in presenting innovative learning activities that assist in maintaining social cohesion and community harmony in our multicultural society.

1. Multicultural Excursions for local schools

The MCNT has experience in organising multicultural excursions to 'places of worship' / 'cultural sites of significance' for local schools in recent years and is receptive to organising similar multicultural excursions in the future. These excursions were based on a successful activity of the MCNT's 2005 "Faith in Harmony" Project funded by DIAC as a *Living in Harmony* Initiative.

The MCNT believes that all Darwin Middle Schools should undertake this type of activity for Year 7 students as an effective orientation for young people to Darwin's multicultural and multi-faith community. These excursions are planned to the themes of inclusion, social history and cultural diversity and are aligned with the curriculum. The MCNT arranges the schedule, authoritative speakers and the itinerary and the excursions are popular with teachers and Middle School students. Sites on the excursion include the Buddhist Temple, the Hindu Temple, the Mosque, Christ Church Anglican Cathedral, the Larrakia memorial at Mindil Beach, the Cenotaph in Bicentennial Park, St Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and the Chinese Temple.

2. National Interfaith and Cross-Cultural Programs

The Sydney-based award winning “Goodness and Kindness” is a national interfaith program funded by DIAC as a *Living in Harmony Partnerships Project*. The basic model of the program is that representatives of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish religions share their ideas and perceptions about religious diversity, community harmony and shared values of compassion and acceptance. “Goodness and kindness” has toured Darwin schools in 2006 and 2007 and the MCNT played a key role with booking the schools and organising the schedule for both of these tours.

The hour-long theatrical program is fast paced and interactive with plenty of surprises and is a combination of storytelling, skits, fun activities and exercises, role play, audience participation and impromptu Q and A sessions. “Goodness and Kindness” nurtures the irrepressible optimism and idealism of young people and demonstrates that people from very different faiths can work together and create synergy and harmony. To date more than 30,000 children throughout Australia have participated in the program.

In March 2006, courtesy of funding from the NT Government’s Community Benefit Fund, the “Goodness and Kindness” program was brought to Darwin by the MCNT for the first time. The program visited 6 local schools (mostly primary schools) over 2 days in its inaugural NT tour with an outreach of some 1,500 students.

In June 2007 the “Goodness and Kindness” program (now known as “Australians Together in Values”) returned to Darwin. This year the program was wholly funded by DIAC and visited 11 schools (mostly primary schools) over 4 days with an outreach of some 2,300 students. The 2007 team comprised Jewish, Muslim and Christian presenters from Sydney as well as a local Indigenous representative Ali Mills.

The Adelaide-based “Project Abraham” is another interfaith education program funded as a *Living in Harmony Partnerships Project* by DIAC. “Project Abraham” promotes interfaith understanding and dialogue and explores commonalities between three Abrahamic Faiths - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - through an Abrahamic exhibition and interfaith seminar open to the broader community, as well as engagement with schools.

In August 2007 the program toured the Northern Territory - Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin - for the first time. In Darwin over 2 days, 5 groups of students from local schools experienced the Abrahamic exhibition presented for an extended season and open to the general public at Darwin City Council’s Casuarina Library. The exhibition was opened by (then) Lord Mayor of Darwin Mr Garry Lambert and featured photographs, maps, and a wide range of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish artefacts. The 90 minute conducted exhibition sessions will also include presentations from the Christian, Muslim and Jewish perspectives from local presenters, and a Q and A session.

The MCNT has formed a partnership with, and are providing a Darwin base for, the Sydney-based Together for Humanity Foundation (the presenter of “Goodness and Kindness”) which presents school-based activities and programs about community harmony around Australia. The Together for Humanity Foundation is developing interfaith and cross-cultural education programs for Darwin schools in 2009. These programs, customised to local circumstances, will address local issues, promote dialogue and focus on bringing together young groups of young people from divergent backgrounds.

Recommendation: The MCNT invites Darwin City Council’s active involvement in these education programs such as through the attendance of the Lord Mayor of Darwin and/or Aldermen on multicultural excursions and the visits of national programs to local schools.

5.3 Harmony

Multiculturalism has always been a way of life in the Territory. There are well-defined reasons for this: Darwin's unique history and social isolation from the eastern states is often cited as the impetus for community harmony as it necessitates requires component communities to build relationships and forge a harmonious multicultural society; in addition the each of the many and varied cultural and faith groups in Darwin has such a small population base, that its members are forced to interact with the wider society.

The Northern Territory has had for some time a well-established national reputation for having a successful harmonious and tolerant multicultural community with a diversity of faiths and cultures. This is not to say however that this relative peace and harmony in the community - particularly in the light of the current global political and social climate - is not fragile and cannot be easily challenged and severely compromised through the widespread re-emergence of racism, religious prejudice and xenophobia.

All too easily the good intentions of those seeking to find common ground and to foster cross-cultural understanding and community harmony can be derailed, even in Darwin, by those seeking to cause discontent and disunity in the community.

5.3.2 Introduce an Annual Good Neighbour Award

The MCNT had a major role in re-launching the Malak Neighbourhood Watch Group in July 2008. The MCNT hosts Malak Neighbourhood Watch meetings as a means of informing our clients about personal safety and assisting in planning and implementing community-driven strategies to address anti-social behavior and crime issues in suburban Malak.

The MCNT has consulted with Malak Neighbourhood Watch about introducing the inaugural Neighbour Day in Malak on Sunday 29th March 2009. Neighbour Day, held on the last Sunday in March each year, was founded in Melbourne in 2003. It is now a well established initiative and is becoming a global event with the backing of the United Nations. Neighbour Day encourages all of us to develop a greater sense of community caring, to look after the vulnerable and isolated in our community, particularly those who live alone.

All of us are neighbours, and everyone can participate in Neighbour Day. There are no organising committees to join, no registration processes, and it is free. It is just a matter of introducing yourself to the people next door and across the street.

Neighbour Day has five principal aims:

- Strengthen communities and build better relationships with the people who live around us;
- Create safer, healthier and more vibrant suburbs and towns;
- Promote tolerance, respect and understanding;
- Break down community barriers; and
- Protect the elderly, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged.

Allied to and as part of the inaugural Neighbour Day on 29th March 2009 for Malak, the MCNT and Malak Neighbourhood Watch will also be introducing the concept of the "Good Neighbour Award" to be presented on this day at a ceremony at the MCNT. This idea is modelled on that in other jurisdictions in southern states, and is a means of recognising the outstanding and valuable contribution of people who selflessly give their time to help others and make their street or neighbourhood a great place to live.

A good neighbour is promoted as “someone who you trust to be there for you in times of need and as someone who looks out for you to make sure you are okay”. The “Good Neighbour Award” is about promoting community harmony and the acceptance of cultural diversity and fostering the positive and productive relationships that are necessary to build strong neighbourhoods and communities.

Recommendation: The MCNT invites Darwin City Council’s active involvement in Neighbour Day and the Good Neighbour Award as city-wide initiatives for 29th March 2009.

5.3.3 Develop programs to promote community cohesion and safety

The MCNT believes that harmonious communities are safe communities. The MCNT through various community engagement programs and activities in partnership with other local service providers is working towards making Malak safer community.

1. The Malak Network

The MCNT is part of the recently formed Malak Network of service providers which meets regularly at Danila Dilba. The Malak Network is analysing the causes and defining solutions for youth-related anti-social behavior and addressing the concerns for community safety in Malak. Part of the solution as we see it is to design accessible and sustainable activities to enhance social interaction and creative dialogue among youth from disadvantaged and diverse backgrounds. There is a website and online forum at www.malak.org.au

One successful, popular and well-attended activity is the regular under 18s dance parties for local young people at Chambers Crescent Theatre. These dance parties are organised by DCA and depend on the support and involvement of a number of youth stakeholders including the Northern Territory Police, Melaleuca Refugee Centre, Mission Australia Youth Beat, YWCA and The SHAK. There have been dance parties on Saturday 20th September and Saturday 1st November. The next dance party is scheduled for Saturday 20th December.

The current project that the Malak Network is working on is Midnight Basketball which will be trialed at the Malak Shopping Centre car park on Friday 5th December.

- Draft Terms of Reference for the Malak Network are attached with this submission.

Recommendation: The MCNT invites Darwin City Council’s active involvement in the Malak Network and assistance with the provision of in kind and financial support for the Malak Network’s initiatives.

2. Refugee Welcome Zone

Over the past 60 years, the Australian nation has welcomed 6 million migrants from more than 200 countries. Almost a quarter of the Australian population was born overseas. In this time Australia has also become home to more than 600,000 refugees.

Australia has a commendable history in meeting its international humanitarian obligations in terms of refugee resettlement in the size of its program as well as in the quality of the settlement services provided. Australia is one of only ten countries that consistently offers resettlement for refugees. On a per capita basis, Australia settles more off-shore refugees and spends more on the settlement needs of these refugees than any other country.

Refugee families, having suffered persecution, social dislocation and protracted displacement, inevitably face serious challenges in successfully adjusting to their new environment and re-building their shattered lives in Australia. It is a difficult journey and many newly-arrived families have the additional burden of experiencing social isolation upon arrival in hostile and threatening neighbourhoods.

It has been the experience of the MCNT and other service providers that the majority of African refugees arriving in Darwin, despite generally having complex resettlement needs have adjusted well to life in Australia, and are grateful for the opportunity for a second chance of life in an environment of peace and security.

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) as the peak representative body in Australia that works with and for refugee communities and the agencies that support them, some years ago introduced the "Refugee Welcome Zone" Declaration concept. The first 15 "Refugee Welcome Zones" were declared by Councils and Shires in Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia to celebrate World Refugee Day in 2002.

The Refugee Welcome Zone initiative has grown throughout Australia and become a great success in connecting local governments with the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers. To date there are more than 60 "Refugee Welcome Zones" throughout Australia. Many local governments throughout Australia have built strong partnerships with community groups and agencies with their jurisdiction to develop policies and implement initiatives which reflect the nature of the Declaration.

By making this Declaration it is hoped that local governments will be encouraged in their continuing efforts to support the men, women and children who make the difficult journey to Australia to seek our protection.

This Declaration is a public statement and symbolic gesture to demonstrate compassion and welcome refugees into our community and also a commitment in spirit to enhance cultural and religious diversity in our community. This Declaration also serves as an acknowledgment of the substantial contributions refugees have made to all sectors of Australian society.

Darwin has a proud history of settling refugees from all over the world who have made an enormous contribution to our economic, social and cultural well-being and the diversity, vibrancy and character of our city.

- Information about the Refugee Welcome Zone is attached with this submission.

Recommendation: The MCNT encourages and invites Darwin City Council to join this national initiative and declare Darwin as "Refugee Welcome Zone" on World Refugee Day, Saturday 20th June 2009.