

Submission from the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory for the Review of the NT Government's Multicultural Policy

6 March 2009



Background to this submission

The Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT), based in suburban Malak in Darwin's northern suburbs, is the one of the two peak representative body for the multicultural community in the Northern Territory. The MCNT receives operational funding as a key stakeholder and independent consultative body for the NT Government.

As defined by the NT Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA), the roles of the MCNT are:

- **Advocacy** - to identify issues of concern and support, represent and promote the interests of the multicultural community, including women, youth and seniors;
- **Community Engagement** - to actively engage with the multicultural groups, regardless of their size and other relevant stakeholders to identify trends and patterns; and
- **Provision of Information** - to canvass views, obtain feedback and identify issues in the multicultural community, including new arrivals, for the relevant organisations as well as for input into submissions and reports.

The MCNT is funded by the Federal Government with two major projects: a Settlements Grants Program project from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) which provides funding to organisations to help new arrivals settle and achieve self-reliance, and the Local Answers Program of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) which combats economic and social disadvantage and ensures to ensures the building of socially inclusive communities.

The MCNT provides information, confidential advice and referral services for its clients from its Malak office. As well the MCNT provides a number of free services for low income earners including taxation advice and migration advice and hosts AMEP classes for women with child care provided. The MCNT also delivers the Emergency Relief Program on behalf of FaHCSIA to assist people in financial crisis situations.

The Minister for Multicultural Affairs launched the Northern Territory's first Multicultural Policy, "*Building on the Territory's Diversity - a Multicultural Policy for migrant and ethnic Territorians*" in February 2005. In December 2008 as part of its commitment to ensure the currency of its policies for all Territorians, the NT Government through OMA announced that it is undertaking a review this Multicultural Policy. As part of the review process, the MCNT in partnership with OMA invited community leaders to provide comments on the current policy and discuss ideas for changes if required at a Community Consultation at the MCNT on Wednesday 11th February 2009.

This submission is based on the feedback collected from the multicultural community at that consultation in addition to the expression of certain policy positions of the MCNT consistent with the stated roles of this organisation. The submission addresses the four Principles that are at the core of this review of Multicultural Policy:

- *Valuing Diversity,*
- *Fair Access,*
- *Encouraging Participation,* and
- *Mutual Respect*

VALUING DIVERSITY

The cultural and linguistic resources and skills of Territorians are valued as social and economic assets, and are recognised for the significant benefits diversity brings to the Territory as a whole.

Cultural Competency Training

Migrants and refugees have the right to culturally appropriate and responsive services. The MCNT believes that all workers involved at the interface with migrant and refugee communities - including community based organisations, the Job Network, Centrelink, the Police, schools, health professionals, child care providers, local government, Charles Darwin University, NT Government agencies and mainstream service providers - should undertake cultural competency training to create awareness and to communicate and interact more effectively with newly arrived refugees from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Cultural competency refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and ensure that they receive access and services appropriate to their cultures. Cultural competency is much more than cultural awareness in that the focus is on integrating cultural perspectives into service delivery. It is possible to be aware of, and even be sensitive to, cultural difference without necessarily doing anything to change practices in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way. Cultural competency implies responsiveness, accountability and reciprocity and is a two way learning process.

- **Recommendation:** The MCNT is advocating mandatory cultural competency training for all personnel in NT Government agencies working with migrant and refugee communities.

CulturFest: Celebrating our Diversity

The Northern Territory Government through various agencies has an admirable record in providing grants for a wide range of projects, initiatives and community events that promote and celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity.

A comment was expressed however at the Community Consultation at the MCNT on 11th February was that there was a tendency for ethnic organisations to celebrate in isolation and that there should be a broadly based annual multicultural festival.

The MCNT in partnership with another Malak based agency Darwin Community Arts (DCA) have trialled a cultural celebration known as *CulturFest* in 2007 and 2008. Our vision for *CulturFest* is a 'multicultural festival' owned by Darwin's ethnic communities: an event for the wider community of Darwin to experience the richness of cultural diversity through music, film, foods, arts and crafts, and performance.

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 the NT Government (and 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 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 the NT Government's involvement in *CulturFest*. Cultural festivals provide these community benefits:

- enhance community engagement opportunities with service providers and government agencies;
- promote neighbourhood and community co-operation and social cohesion through celebrating community harmony;
- promote artistic expression and skills development and raise the profile of talented individuals within communities;
- foster the participation of socially isolated CALD background individuals and groups in community life and improve individual well-being and self-esteem;
- create accessible and low-cost opportunities for social participation and recreation in neighbourhoods and communities with long-term cultural tourism potential;
- promote awareness of community issues and foster a sense of community identity for established and emerging communities and build a sense of belonging for everyone in the neighbourhood to the local area through shared public space and facilities;
- maintain and preserve the artistic and cultural traditions within ethnic communities for future generations;
- showcase and share the diversity of artistic and cultural traditions of ethnic communities with the wider community;
- contribute to and encourage the appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity in the Northern Territory;
- promote the benefits of cultural diversity and the contributions of CALD background individuals and groups to the Northern Territory community;
- strengthen the capacity and promote the economic and social development of CALD communities and their organisations;
- encourage cross-cultural respect and understanding and work towards countering negative cultural stereotypes;
- facilitate positive interactions and professional relationships between people of different ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds;
- foster the development of enhanced inter-cultural networks and increased communication and collaboration between and within communities and organisations; and
- build supportive neighbourhoods with intercultural empathy and trust, positive exchanges and reduced tensions between new migrants and longer term residents.

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.

The MCNT will be modelling *Culturfest* for 2009 and future years on a successful annual multicultural festival of "food, friendship and Fun" known as *Cultural Fest* in Townsville, hosted by the Townsville Intercultural Centre in partnership with Townsville City Council. *Cultural Fest* with the theme of "Unity in Diversity" started as a one-day event featuring 20 local dance groups and food stalls some fifteen years ago. *Cultural Fest* is now staged over five days in August at The Strand adjacent to Townsville's city beach and is North

Queensland's signature event. Cultural Fest attracts 80,000 visitors is a major tourist attraction for the city of Townsville.

Cultural Fest is one of the largest and most well-known multicultural festivals in Australia and the performance stage showcases the talents of Queensland's most exciting music and dance entertainers. The event involves 350 participants including community groups and businesses with food and market stalls, authentic Indigenous arts and crafts, an environmental exhibition, sporting tournaments, workshops, a dance party, a fashion parade, a citizenship ceremony and children's activities. Also as part of *Cultural Fest* there is the Tropic Carnival, a street parade with 50 floats.

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 MCNT proudly supports multiculturalism and also 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. Similarly 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.

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 NT Government through the NT Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) has provided significant grant funding to schools, ethnic community organisations, service providers, and local councils for harmony based activities. The NT Government also hosts a high profile Harmony Day civic reception each year. The MCNT supports the NT Government's involvement with Harmony Month and would trust that this continues. All too easily the good intentions of those seeking to find common ground and to foster social inclusion and community harmony can be derailed, even in Darwin, by those seeking to cause discontent and disunity in the community.

- **Recommendation:** The MCNT is inviting the NT Government to be an event partner and sponsor for *CulturFest* at this exciting stage of its development.

FAIR ACCESS

All Territorians, regardless of their background, have a right to fair and equitable access to government services and programs, while recognising the different needs arising from Territorians' cultural and linguistic diversity.

Improved aged care for CALD communities

Australia's ageing population is a major demographic challenge and the population from CALD backgrounds is growing faster than for other Australians. The major contributors to population ageing in Australia are: large numbers of ageing 'baby boomers', increased life expectancy, and declining fertility rates.

The experience of ageing for most older Australians in mainstream society is now very positive with dramatic increases in recent years in health and well-being, but there remain a number of issues of concern and societal, economic, and health consequences of ageing for older people in CALD communities which are not generally recognised.

According to the 2006 Census, the Northern Territory had the youngest population of all states and territories, with a median age of 31 years. Yet paradoxically, the Northern Territory's population is also ageing, and faster than the national average.

In a Northern Territory context, it must be stated that there are two distinct populations and that the ageing experience for these two populations is markedly different. While the ageing experience is becoming more positive for seniors in the non-Indigenous population (including the CALD communities), this is usually not the case for seniors in the Indigenous population.

Darwin has the fastest growth rate of the CALD population projected for any capital city in Australia, although that projection is from a very low numerical base. By 2011, it is expected that one-third of Darwin's older residents are expected to be from CALD backgrounds and the three most common countries of birth in the older CALD population are projected to be Greece, Indonesia and Germany.

Another factor unique to the Territory is the large population of Indigenous people. Recent successful developments in extending the longevity of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory will ensure that in future years, the proportion of Aboriginal people in the senior population will increase and is projected to be 17% in 2011.

The cultural diversity in Darwin's older population is also increasing with changing migration patterns from interstate and overseas; more so than in the other capital cities. Another demographic factor to take into account in assessment of the ageing population in Darwin is that Darwin's proximity to Asia accounts for differences in its migration pattern and structure of the CALD community. There are four ethnic groups unique to the Top Ten of the Northern Territory's source countries of migration intake - Indonesia, Sri Lanka, The Philippines and Malaysia - that do not occur in demographic data elsewhere in Australia.

Apart from the recent demographic trends, there are social factors impacting on the decision of more seniors than before to plan to remain the Territory for their retirement and not move interstate, apparently because of advances in lifestyle, social infrastructure and access to services. This factor in addition to the rapidly ageing population of the Northern Territory will place demands on the availability of aged care accommodation in

future years. The single most important factor in encouraging more people in the mainstream community to retire in the Territory is the establishment of affordable lifestyle villages.

The standard and availability of aged care in the Northern Territory is generally regarded by the mainstream senior population as adequate. However for the CALD population because of current low numbers, there are no ethno-specific aged care facilities or clustering of CALD communities of interest within mainstream institutions.

The current situation of the lack of culturally-specific CALD seniors accommodation will not change dramatically in the near future because of the numerically low numbers of the various CALD communities. In addition, there is a lack of availability of cultural competency and commitment by staff to ensuring that the special needs of CALD communities are identified and addressed. The exception to this maxim would be the availability of culturally appropriate aged care for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

In the Northern Territory, the Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care (PICAC) national initiative, which funded by the Australian Government, involves partnerships between aged care service providers and CALD community organisations. The funded PICAC agency is the Council of the Ageing Northern Territory (COTANT). The PICAC program has operated successfully for a number of years in cooperation with the Community Partners Project (CPP) auspiced by Carers NT to achieve outcomes for the CALD communities.

The PICAC Officer in the Northern Territory services aged care residential and community aged care service providers with information and advice on culturally competent work practices and protocols for their CALD community clients. It is reported that there is a low level of cultural competency within these service providers or across the industry as a whole. It is argued that there is a low level of understanding of aged care in the mainstream community, and an even lower understanding of the ethnically-specific needs of older people in CALD communities that require aged care.

It is believed by the PICAC Officer that cultural competency should be integrated within service delivery at all levels in a “whole of institution” approach. The scheduling of cultural awareness and cultural competency training courses for culturally appropriate aged care is problematical in Darwin as there is a high staff turnover and a general reluctance within the industry to provide time for the staff members to attend the cultural competency training.

The PICAC Officer has developed a resource, in consultation with CALD communities, specifically designed to assist for older CALD people in aged care: a “non-verbal communication booklet”. This booklet contains pictograms to demonstrate needs and requests for CALD people and is useful for all language groups. This resource can be customised for individual clients.

The PICAC Officer also provides support and information to the NT Government funded Greek, Italian, Filipino, Chinese and Timorese/Portuguese seniors groups in Darwin to assist with home/community based aged care for CALD communities.

The Australian Red Cross in Darwin is currently providing training for carers from CALD backgrounds in culturally appropriate aged care.

From consulting with stakeholders the main areas of concern for institutionalised aged care in CALD communities in the context of access to government services are:

- **financial stress** - many older people in the CALD community are “asset-rich and income poor” and have not accumulated reserves of superannuation; there needs to be flexibility for people receiving the pension to be able to earn income; there is also an issue with overseas pensions and its impact on entitlements in Australia;
- **language** - a lack of carers across specific language groups for ageing CALD communities; language is intrinsically associated with culture; there appears to be no policy in place to actively promote recruitment of bilingual staff in the industry;
- **food** - the availability of culturally appropriate food in aged care institutions is a major issue, and there seems little effort to accommodate individual needs; it is often not understood that many ethnic groups have specific dietary requirements and that food has social, cultural and spiritual significance; and
- **social isolation** - there is a local demographic phenomenon of older women of Asian origin who married older Anglo origin men who have now become widows, and have not developed strong social networks; these women often with English proficiency and they have become isolated not only from mainstream Australian society but also from their own ethnic communities.

Given these above issues of concern, there is often the preference for aged care in the home for the CALD communities in the Northern Territory, funded by the Home and Community Care (HACC) Commonwealth/Territory initiative, and provides support services for CALD aged people and their carers. These services support CALD community people to maintain their independence and pride, enhance their quality of life, enables them to stay in their home and prevents inappropriate admission to long term residential care.

- **Recommendation:** The MCNT is inviting the NT Government to support the work of COTANT and the Australian Red Cross in Darwin in providing culturally appropriate aged care for the CALD communities.

Improved health care access for CALD community women

While new arrivals experience the same challenges as other Australians in accessing health care services including the limited availability of and access to health professionals, this is compounded by the physical and psychological health issues for many migrant and refugee women. Women comprise the majority of refugees fleeing from conflict zones and failed states and often have personal histories of torture and trauma in their countries of origin.

Refugee families, having suffered persecution, poverty, 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 unfamiliar and at times hostile neighbourhoods.

The experience for recently arrived migrant and refugee women during settlement in navigating a different health system places a further burden on their health status. Lower levels of English proficiency and cultural transition also compound difficulties in accessing and understanding the Australian health system.

The MCNT in partnership with relevant agencies is committed to improving the health of migrant and refugee women and is developing a Migrant Women's Health Project. This project requires the support of the NT Government to fund the recruitment of ethno-specific bilingual health educators and a project officer to address deficiencies in health and medicinal information and improve access to health services for migrant and refugee women.

Through this project the MCNT will also advocate for the provision of accurate information to medical practitioners on the needs of these clients, the development of productive partnerships between health services and ethnic community groups and the effective delivery of culturally appropriate health services.

- **Recommendation:** The MCNT is inviting the NT Government to financially support the establishment and sustainability of the Migrant Women's Health Project.

Meeting the needs of the Territory's multicultural youth

The MCNT shares office space with and auspices another organisation - the Multicultural Youth Northern Territory (MyNT). This organisation is affiliated with the MCNT and emerged out of a Multicultural Youth Forum in April 2007 during National Youth Week. The MyNT has the mission to "*unify youth from all cultural backgrounds to create a better Territory with more opportunities and greater understanding*", and was recently awarded a substantial grant over three years from the Foundation for Young Australians.

Over the past two years, the MyNT has been very active and has conducted a number of events around Darwin with the purpose of integrating youth from diverse cultural backgrounds. The MyNT was awarded the Charles See Kee Award (for counteracting racism and promoting multiculturalism) from the NT government in March 2008.

The MyNT functions as the youth advisory committee of the MCNT and was originally conceived in late 2006 as a response to the expression of cross-cultural youth tensions in the northern suburbs of Darwin. Seed funding for the Multicultural Youth Forum and the MyNT was provided from the NT Government through the NT Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) and the NT Office of Youth Affairs (OYA).

Upon investigation of the issues for CALD community youth, it became apparent that many young people of migrant and refugee background struggle with changes during adolescence, do not gain the recognition and respect for their cultural values and experience an estrangement from the broader community. It was also observed that the current services to youth are delivered on *ad hoc* basis.

Over some time the MCNT has identified through its interactions with its client base the need for this peak community organisation to give due consideration to the critical issues of youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and for Darwin's multicultural youth to have a channel through which they could voice their opinions and thoughts.

The MCNT will ensure that the MyNT informs Darwin's service providers and policy makers about youth issues and the social, recreational, and educational needs of youth. In terms of youth and multicultural policy, the MCNT believes that the NT Government should:

- acknowledge that youth have a role to play in the formulation of policies and introduction of programs that affect them and their physical and emotional environment;
- develop team-building and leadership skills in young people, and identify future youth role models and mentors who earn the respect of their own elders and the community;
- provide a forum for comment on discussion papers and input into policies initiated by Territory and Australian Governments that recognise and meet youth needs;

- empower youth to provide input into NT Government multicultural policy and value the participation of youth in all areas of activities and networks across the wider community;
 - guide multicultural youth to contribute to positive actions of benefit to themselves and their families, their community, and their cultural group; and
 - provide opportunities for multicultural youth representation in forums to translate their vitality and creativity into innovative multicultural policy positions.
- **Recommendation:** The MCNT is inviting the NT Government to recognise and support the MyNT as the peak body for the Territory's multicultural youth.

Meeting the needs of the Territory's African community

The MCNT has been advocating for some time about the need for an African Community Support Worker (CSW) funded by the NT Government. The NT Government funds three ethno-specific Community Support Workers for other established communities under the Multicultural Affairs Sponsorship Program (MASP).

It is the MCNT's view that the African community in Darwin is now quite large and diverse has its own specific and serious issues with settlement and integration. Darwin's refugee intake until recent years was primarily composed of people from African countries. The African community is one of the youngest and the fastest growing new culturally and religiously diverse communities in Australia.

There has been and there remains the potential for inter-cultural conflicts involving African refugees/migrants and other groups - as recently as October 2008 - and such an initiative of the NT Government would most likely be seen by the general population as proactive and in the interests of social inclusion, community harmony and multiculturalism.

The MCNT interacts closely with its clients and in recent times has become aware of, and concerned about, community safety issues for a number recently arrived African refugee families in the suburbs of Malak and Karama. Recent documented cases would appear to indicate there is a concerted campaign by some residents in these suburbs to force these newly-arrived African families to leave. The pattern of recent incidents would indicate systemic intolerance and serious potential for escalation.

Clearly incidents of harassment and intimidation will severely compromise the likelihood of a positive and productive settlement experience. In the wider context these inter-cultural conflicts are causing distress for a number of Darwin's emerging communities. OMA's "Multicultural Information Directory" describes the CSWs in this way: *"These community welfare workers assist in the settlement needs of migrants, refugees and people from diverse cultural backgrounds by providing information on assistance and services available; support on various issues such as domestic violence and crisis situations"*.

The Report for OMA's commissioned and funded research "Engagement of the African Community in the Northern Territory: Their Settlement, Education, Workforce and Community Participation" states: *"The Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) identified the African refugee community, which is a relatively new and rapidly growing community in the Northern Territory as an appropriate community for engagement"*.

Admittedly there is a historical (and perhaps political) context to the three existing CSW positions - the Chinese Community (Chung Wah Society), the Greek Community (Greek Orthodox Community of North Australia), and the Italian/East Timorese Community (Canossian Sisters of the Catholic Diocese of Darwin) - these were created by the NT Government in the early 1990s.

Given the concerns about safety issues, inter-cultural conflicts and documented cases of “crisis situations” in a number of African families with child protection and foster care issues, the MCNT believes that there is a compelling case for the NT Government creating a CSW position for the African community.

- **Recommendation:** The MCNT believes that in the interests of equity and fairness and the present demographic reality, there should be a funded African CSW position.

Community Engagement Meetings

Since February 2008 OMA has scheduled regular meetings with community leaders and groups. These “community engagement meetings” also involve representatives from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and MCNT. These meetings are a way for these agencies to meet the leaders and committees of Darwin’s major ethnic community organisations - established as well as emerging - and encourage open communication and direct access for ethnic community groups to the three agencies.

The open communication and two-way exchange of information and ideas demonstrates that the NT Government will work with the multicultural community and ensure that community-specific issues and concerns are identified and addressed. Communities feel valued and empowered through the recognition that ethnic communities are a significant resource of expertise, knowledge and experience to be utilised by NT Government agencies and play a major role in developing the Territory.

The “community engagement meetings” provide an opportunity for the NT Government to engage ethnic communities and provide information about OMA programs and services and community leaders are able to actively participate in decisions affecting their lives and their communities and in developing multicultural policy.

- **Recommendation:** The MCNT believes that these “community engagement meetings” provide a valuable service for the multicultural community and should continue.

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

Recognising that our key public institutions - including Parliament, the public service, government boards, committees and other key advisory mechanisms - should, as far as possible, reflect the cultural diversity of the communities that they serve.

Employment for CALD communities: the “Job Club” Initiative

The NT Government in its Multicultural Policy states: *“Fostering a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce makes good economic sense. Territorians who are multilingual, understand the culture of trading and societal connections, or have overseas networks and knowledge, are invaluable assets in increasing trade and promoting tourism”.*

The MCNT believes that meaningful employment and career development should not be separated from the settlement experience but in fact are essential to social inclusion, successful integration and effective participation of migrants and refugees in the mainstream Australian society and economy. It is an aim of the MCNT to identify and address barriers to social and economic participation. The MCNT recognises that one of the major challenges for new settlers in the Northern Territory is finding meaningful and sustainable employment.

Even for migrants and refugees who find suitable employment, there are issues with cultural norms and expectations, adjusting to Australian workplace culture and business practice, and differences in behaviour and communication. As well a lot of employment for migrants and refugees does not meet the aspirations of these jobseekers.

The MCNT takes the view that refugees in general are a highly resourceful and resilient group of people with a strong desire to succeed and a lot to offer the nation. Even so, refugee communities have lower participation rates and higher unemployment rates than for the mainstream community. In the context of the global economic crisis there needs to be a greater focus on community-driven and holistic employment programs that provide real work experience, address structural and cultural barriers, and achieve measurable outcomes for CALD community jobseekers.

The MCNT is developing a “Job Club” initiative that is project that is designed to provide employment related assistance for humanitarian entrants and promote ownership of the job search process for its clients: the “Job Club” initiative will include assistance with drafting CVs and job applications, letters of support/references, direct contact with employers, job interview preparation, referrals for skills recognition and training, cultural awareness training for trainers and employers, and diversity at work awards.

The MCNT is seeking funding from the Federal Government for its “Job Club” initiative. If there is sufficient funding, a “Job Club” project officer will be appointed to network with employers and other employment stakeholders including the Job Network, service providers and NT Government departments to assist the MCNT’s clients with employment pathways. The MCNT would welcome the involvement of the NT Government agencies such as OMA and the Department of Business and Employment in this proposal.

- **Recommendation:** The MCNT advocates that the NT Department of Business and Employment support the “Job Club” as a specialist CALD initiative.

CALD Communities Development Centre

The MCNT advocates the development of an ethnic community development centre in Darwin, possibly creating a “multicultural hub” adjacent the office of the MCNT at the Malak Shopping Centre. The MCNT has spoken to the Northern Territory Area Consultative Committee about the possibility of Regional and Local Government Community Infrastructure Program (RLCIP) funding towards this project.

In a review of the NT Government funded Community Support Worker (CSW) Project in 2003, it was canvassed that other communities should be considered in need of these ethno-specific support services, and furthermore that these services should be brought together in one location under the auspices of one community organisation (such as the MCNT).

This proposal for an ethnic community development centre is based on a model from Canberra, the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre. This multi-purpose Centre was opened in December 2005 as a hub for all multicultural community activities in the ACT and was funded by the ACT Government. The ACT Multicultural Council (analogous to the MCNT), the ACT Office of Multicultural Affairs (ACT Government) and other relevant peak bodies and service providers have their offices in this centre. As well more than 20 offices for ethnic community groups are accommodated in the building.

During the design stages of the Centre, new and emerging communities were consulted to ensure their views were taken into account and to ensure that the perspective of these ethnic community groups the new facility was as functional as possible.

The offices are about 6 m x 9 m in size and have the basic infrastructure provided. Ethnic community groups pay a community rate (about 25% of the market) for rent. The ethnic community offices at the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre are usually staffed by volunteers during the day, and are also staffed during the evenings. The building itself is open 5 days a week. Apparently the building is very pleasant to work in and to visit. As well as the offices, there are meeting and function rooms and an art gallery.

There are ethno-specific community functions and celebrations regularly throughout the year, and the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre has become a tourist attraction that showcases multiculturalism in Canberra.

This ‘one stop shop’ model is particularly empowering for the under-resourced new and emerging groups - it provides a presence, as well as a network and a sharing and learning environment. As well of course this model provides all ethnic groups the opportunity to interact and not operate in isolation. Smaller groups would be able to share office space.

For a Centre in Darwin, the NT Government would be able to assist through furnishing offices with computers, internet, phone and fax and photocopying services for basic administrative capacity. Training and support could also be provided to members of the ethnic organisations to build their capacity to effectively use the office to achieve self-reliance during settlement.

The MCNT will apply for RLCIP funding for this proposal, with the Darwin City Council as the sponsoring organisation. With sufficient funding, a Multicultural Development Officer could be employed at the Centre to offer support and expertise, present workshops and information sessions, and assist community groups with applying for grants and event management.

There are a number of benefits of this Centre model for Darwin's ethnic communities:

- sharing office space will assist CALD community groups to address common issues, share ideas, decision making and governance;
- the Centre will facilitate an increased capacity for CALD community groups to solve problems in synergy and overcome isolation;
- the Centre will provide the opportunity for skill development and training, which will be of benefit to employment pathways for CALD community individuals.

- **Recommendation:** The MCNT would welcome the support of the NT Government in developing a CALD Communities Development Centre for Darwin.

Subsidised driver training for CALD communities

In the MCNT's work with migrant and refugee communities in Darwin, an issue that is often raised is the complexity and expense of the driver education and training system. There are constant complaints about how difficult it is to get a driver's licence. It can be argued that for CALD community clients, having a driver's licence is essential for employment.

This requirement is evident in terms of being able to get to work on time, but in addition many occupations require a driver's licence. Having a driver's license is often one of the expressed selection criteria in job applications, even when driving is not necessarily part of everyday work duties. As well, having a driver's licence is integral to the settlement process as it is the most readily acceptable form of identification at banks and other mainstream agencies.

While many clients can obtain their L plates without too much trouble, they are often still not sufficiently conversant with the Australian road rules; often the L plates expire before they are able to obtain their P plates. Many of these newly arrived clients are on low incomes and find it too expensive to pay commercial rates (\$60 an hour) to complete sufficient lessons from qualified instructors to obtain their driver's licences.

In the Northern Territory the lack of a driver's license is often a major barrier to employment. This is particularly the case for shift workers when there is a lack of effective public transport for out of normal working hours. There are documented cases of African refugees having missed out on job opportunities because they didn't have a driver's licence.

As well there is anecdotal feedback that a number of employers have refused, or are reluctant to, give jobs to recently arrived refugees and migrants on the basis of not having a driver's license and or adequate public transport. For many clients this attitude of employers is a form of opportunistic discrimination, even when a commitment to punctuality and reliability can be demonstrated.

The lack of driver's licences has been identified as a significant employment barrier for new arrivals in at least two studies in recent years by the Northern Territory Government - OMA's "Engagement of the African Community in the Northern Territory: Their Settlement, Education, Workforce and Community Participation" Report (2006) and DEET's Workforce NT Report (2005).

In Victoria and Tasmania there are apparently driver education and training programs specifically targeted to migrants and refugees. The MCNT believes that for newly arrived

CALD clients, a more accessible system for driver education and training, i.e. subsidised lesson voucher scheme will ultimately create pathways to employment.

The NT Government through the Department of Education and Training already has the Driver Training and Licensing Program (DTAL) successfully operating for 16 to 18 year old students. The DTAL Program is an initiative of the NT Government and is sponsored by TIO. The Northern Territory is the only place in Australia that offers such a subsidised program for 16 to 18 year old learner drivers. The DTAL Program provides these young people road user awareness and preliminary practical skills to help them to become safe, proficient and skilful drivers in the community.

The MCNT is advocating that a program similar to DTAL with its subsidised lesson voucher scheme, and funded by the NT Government, be introduced for newly arrived migrants and refugees. This investment by the NT Government will have a number of community benefits including increased employment as well as enhanced public safety on our roads.

- **Recommendation:** The MCNT is advocating the introduction of a subsidised lesson scheme for driver training for CALD communities with support of the NT Department of Education and Training.

MUTUAL RESPECT

The culture, language and religion (or spiritual beliefs) of Territorians are respected, within the overarching framework of Australia and Northern Territory laws and our social, political and legal institutions.

Interfaith and Intercultural Orientation for Children

Globalisation and pluralism present challenges and opportunities in the 21st century. All of us - as educators and learners - more than ever before, live in close contact and interact with people from a diversity of cultural, religious, and ideological traditions. The Northern Territory is situated in the most culturally, religiously and ethnically diverse region in the world - a region of conflict, change and continuity where various cultures and faiths meet. Almost every major world religion is demographically significant in South East Asia: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

If our young people are provided the opportunity to learn about and empathise with people from different faiths and cultures in the region in structured activities, it will avoid development of entrenched prejudice and endemic hostility and foster greater understanding of the reasons why people think and behave in the way that they do.

Interfaith and intercultural education integrated across school curricula will assist with developing awareness and compassion, an understanding of difference, and an acceptance of diversity for our young people. A basic understanding of the diverse range of cultures and faiths of the world will foster social cohesion and peaceful coexistence and ensure that young people develop empathy and compassion and act in the long-term interests of the planet and humanity.

The Sydney-based *Together for Humanity Foundation* is funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to organise and present interfaith/cross-cultural programs such as “Goodness and Kindness” in schools throughout Australia. The aim of *Together for Humanity* is to foster inclusion and acceptance of diversity among and between young people from different cultural, ethnic, religious and social backgrounds.

Rabbi Zalman Kastel, the National Coordinator of the *Together for Humanity Foundation* has been liaising with Darwin stakeholders with a view to setting up a Darwin steering committee and formulating sustainable programs for Darwin schools focussed on addressing local issues, raising awareness and creating opportunities for cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue. Local programs will be mapped to the NT Curriculum Framework.

In terms of mapping the NT Curriculum Framework to the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools of the nine identified values, there are two: “**respect**” (*Treat others with consideration and regard, respect another person’s point of view*); and “**understanding, tolerance and inclusion**” (*Be aware of others and their cultures, accept diversity within a democratic society, being included and including others*) that stand out as having the greatest potential for intercultural and interfaith orientation exercises.

The MCNT believes that experiential learning exercises help children to interact with and understand other concepts, cultures and belief systems and appreciate the social benefits of multiculturalism. 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.

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 are planned to the themes of inclusion, social history and cultural diversity. The MCNT also has experience in arranging guest speakers for schools in a multicultural context - be they from culturally and/or religiously diverse backgrounds.

The MCNT believes that all Darwin Middle Schools should have cultural orientation for Year 7 students through either national or locally based programs as part of the curriculum to introduce these young people to Darwin’s multicultural and multi-faith community.

- **Recommendation:** The MCNT advocates that the NT Department of Education and Training introduce cultural orientation as part of the school curriculum.

Introduce an Annual Good Neighbour Award

The MCNT had a major role in re-launching the Malak Neighbourhood Watch Group in July 2008 and has been implementing community-driven strategies to address anti-social behavior and promote social inclusion and community harmony 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. 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”. 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 future Neighbour Day observances, 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.

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 the NT Government’s active involvement in Neighbour Day and the Good Neighbour Award for the last Sunday in March.