



Our Community, Our Future



Envisioning the Future

MUSLIM YOUTH SUMMIT

FOCUS ISSUES:



Family Relationships



Dating & Marriage



Identity & Belonging



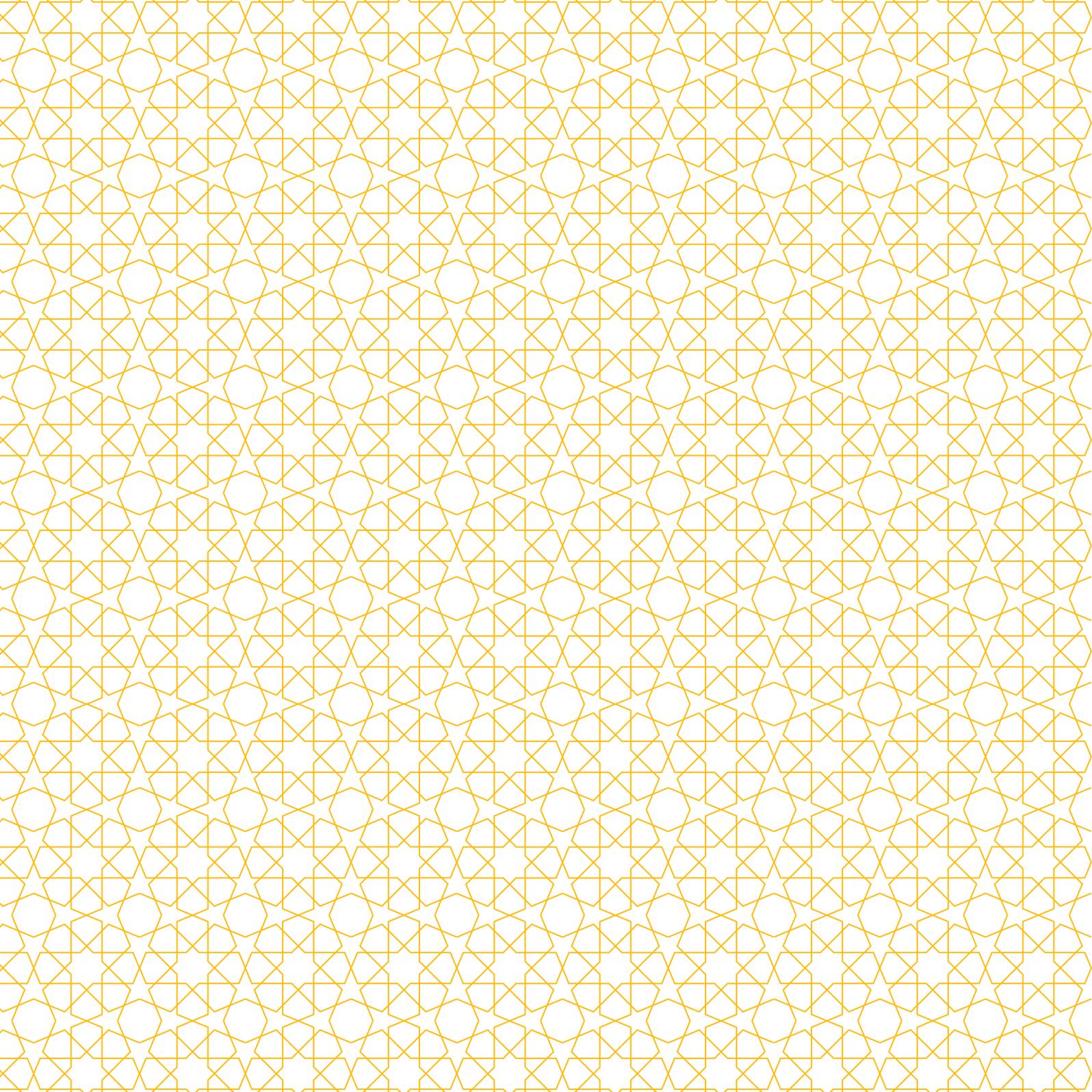
Education & Employment



Bullying, Peer Pressure & Online Issues



Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being



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Executive Summary

Despite the prevalence of research that “one-size does not fit all” when dealing with minority communities, positive solutions that address the needs of Australian Muslim young people neglect to account for the voices and experiences of Muslim young people while often being embedded in Eurocentricism.

The Forward Thinking Forum Project is a unique project that is aimed at informing community capacity building endeavours that incorporate the privileged voice of the South-Western Sydney Muslims through robust focus group discussions involving 21 young Muslims. Various initiatives were generated by the participants to address the following six themes: family relationships; dating and marriage; identity and belonging; education and employment; bullying, peer pressure and online issues; and mental health and emotional well-being, all of which were identified as areas of concern prior to the focus group discussions.

The project revealed that participants were information-rich, having an excellent grasp of the needs of young people, as well as the community context. Sharing a common objective from the outset participants hoped to devise practical initiatives that would translate to meaningful social impact in the community. The dual strategy of a strength based approach and shared terms of reference informed the approach taken in the Forum enabling both participant expectations and project aims and objectives to be actualised. Participants continuously voiced their feelings of empowerment as a result of personally being involved in generating initiatives that incorporated their collective knowledge, skill and experiences.



When building community capacity, it is essential to utilise a strength-based approach and operate within the community's terms of reference. Imposing capacity building initiatives outside of the community's terms of reference is likely to be ineffective or even unrecognisable to the community. Equally, it is imperative that external stakeholders who seek to engage with the Muslim community do so via a strength-based approach that reflects positive and proactive terminology whilst operating within the community's terms of reference. This approach recognises the strengths, assets and successes within the community while positioning external stakeholders as 'facilitating' and not 'fixing'.

An innovative feature of the Forum was the instruments for critical thinking that assisted participants in generating the community building capacity initiatives. The Yarning Circle proved an effective instrument for orientating participants towards their terms of reference and thus an Islamic worldview, while providing a lens to apply contextual understanding of themes. It was also a practical instrument to initiate healing and a way forward from the negative post-911/Cronulla riots world and the often reactionary mindset that can curtail forward thinking in the community. A feature of minority communities can be symptomatic

disunity and defragmentation. In the case of the Muslim community, processes are required for healing in order to firstly, move forward; secondly, to overcome historical barriers, and thirdly, to resolve the generational gap polemicizing cultural norms and religious observances. Specifically in the Forum, The Yarning Circle through its processes of healing allowed participants to step away from the often exhausting effort of working in the community on account of the myriad social complexities to negotiate and the debilitating effects of deficit based approaches to conceive for forward thinking initiatives.

Complementing the Yarning Circle was de Bono's Thinking Hats, proving to be a very effective data collection instrument during the focus group discussions. It was embedded with critical thinking strategies and was a means for generating robust and informed initiatives. The de Bono Thinking Hats have merit to be used further in action planning and implementation of proposed initiatives. Many initiatives require a holistic approach and inter-agency collaboration. A pilot study on the action plan of key initiatives would further inform this process. Equally, young people need to be engaged in the implementation of these initiatives. The process would likely be as empowering to young people as the outcomes.

01 Project Background

1.1. Project Aims & Objectives

AIMS



1 To formulate a youth policy for the Lebanese Muslim Association (LMA) and the wider Muslim community.



2 To identify strengths and challenges that inform participants suggested community capacity building initiatives.



3 To inform potential implementation of LMA driven community capacity building initiatives.



4 To provide an evidence-base to inform a 'whole community' approach for inter-agency community capacity building initiatives.

OBJECTIVES



1 To engage 21 young people between the ages of 17 – 28 to attend the 'Forward Thinking Forum'.



2 To produce a final report that presents all findings, including initiatives young people develop in the facilitated focus group discussions.



3 To employ experienced facilitators with expertise in various disciplines who have conducted prior research in the Muslim community for group discussion facilitation.



1.2. Community Context

This report has been developed during a trying time for the Australian Muslim Community, as it struggles with the challenges of being a recent and growing migrant community, as well as being the focus of media and political criticism. With much of the attention being focused on the youth of the Australian Muslim Community as the ones most affected by the social, economic and educational struggles of the community, they become the group most influenced by unorthodox ideologies and potentially feeling alienated from mainstream Australian society.

At the moment, the Australian Muslim Community is a relatively young community, with 58.6% of Australian Muslims being under the age of 29, with 81.8% of Australian born Muslims are under the age of 25.¹ The community also suffers from having a jobless rate that is more than double the national average, and more than a third of Muslims had weekly incomes under \$400.² Furthermore, there are difficulties in relation to accessibility of educational and financial opportunities, and these create an environment where social problems can arise and flourish.

It is from this context of a disadvantaged community that extremities arise and are propelled into the public sphere by media and politics. However often what is ignored is not only said context, but also the voices

of the young people that struggle with these realities every day.

Thus, this weekend provided a small group of youth an opportunity to engage with a community institution and actively contribute to the strategies being implemented to engage with and address the struggles the Australian Muslim Community is facing.

1.3. Strategy & Approach

A number of overarching strategies informed the approach taken in the Forward Thinking Forum Project. These strategies included a strength based approach (SBA) and a focus on Terms of Reference (TOR). They were applied across the facilitation, focus group discussions and report compilation phases of the project. These strategies considered the needs of the local Muslim community as well as the current geo-political and social context that the community exists and functions within.

At the core of the SBA is the focus on strengths over weaknesses and assets over deficits (Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region, 2001). This approach would provide a clear direction for the focus groups and the engagement of the young people with the identified themes and issues. It would offer a different language to describe, conceive for and address community challenges. The approach didn't ignore or skim over

¹ Muslims in Australia: A Snapshot, The Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/settle/multicultural_australia/Muslims_in_Australia_snapshot.pdf)

² As reported in the Herald Sun, by John Masanauskas, July 10, 2014 (<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/number-of-unemployed-muslims-more-than-twice-national-average/story-fni0ft3-1226984668794>)



the oftentimes complex issues and challenges facing the Muslim community; rather it served to direct efforts toward providing more holistic suggestions and informed initiatives from a platform of optimism, positivity (Hammond, 2011) and reliance on the Creator.

In contrast to a SBA, a deficit based approach (DBA) leads to a cycle of focusing on what is wrong or problematic with the local Muslim community. The prevailing DBA has been



Islam has been described as a complete way of life, unifying all aspects of public and personal life whilst directing toward ultimate purpose: to worship Allah (SWT) and to fulfil the responsibility of being custodians on earth.

seen to severely constrain community capacity and development while disempowering its young people. Often the disproportionate focus on failings positions the community in a depreciating reactionary mode (Fairs, 2014). For community members, individually or collectively, an unremitting and limiting focus on who they are not, rather than who they are can become is exhausting; further stifling initiative and the capacity of the community (Faris, 2014). Above all, the DBA ignores the strengths, assets, progress, successes and longstanding contribution of the local Muslim community.

The second overarching strategy informing the approach relates to TOR³ which provides the parameters for the infusion of worldview. Worldview can be described as the lens through which one sees and understands the world (Chown, 2014). It provides a system for recognising the meaning in all things (Al-Attas, 2005). It influences values, beliefs and therefore the actions and decision one makes (Chown, 2014). In other words worldview informs our ways of knowing and ways of doing which ultimately determines our way of being in the world (Martin, 2003). This infusion of worldview enabled participants to operate within their shared Islamic worldview. This was a critical component for the Forward Thinking Forum if participants were to devise positive initiatives to build community capacity.

To operate outside of the TOR would mean community capacity was compromised by the inability to benefit from the Qur'an, Sunnah, the *Ijma'* (consensus) of the *Ulema* (scholars) and the lived example within the rich history of Muslim civilisations that best informs the community's ways of knowing, doing and being. This could also result in subsequent initiatives being applied or imposed that are lacking in authenticity, which would most likely be rejected or be ineffective on account of being unrecognisable to the community. In addition to avoiding the aforementioned concerns, TOR in this project would serve to guide future contact and engagement with government, outside

bodies and organisations, or mainstream services which would be necessary for holistic initiatives conceived of by participants. TOR combined with a SBA, would position those working with the community as 'facilitating' rather than 'fixing' (Hammond, 2011).

TOR provide the parameters of a shared Islamic worldview, since this approach does not limit or restrict participants from creative or contemporary thought. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said that wisdom is the lost property of the believer, so wherever he finds it then he has a right to it⁴. It was thus via the *filtering and orientating function of worldview*, that the participants were able to *conceive within their TOR of new initiatives and new ways of doing* from contemporary research and practice and *apply this to their knowledge and understandings of the context*.

Islam has been described as a complete way of life, unifying all aspects of public and personal life whilst directing toward ultimate purpose: to worship Allah⁵ (SWT) and to fulfil the responsibility of being custodians on earth⁶. Its origin in revelation, an Islamic worldview informs the community's ways of knowing; ways of doing and ways of being in the world as well as hopes for the hereafter (Al-Attas, 2005). The TOR was therefore an enabling and empowering strategy that held great synergy with the principles of a SBA. Together, these overarching strategies informed the approach taken in this project.

³ The concept of TOR has been adapted from Aboriginal Terms of Reference, as explained by Watson (1986) and Graham (1999). TOR in this project refers to the terms that explain ways of knowing, doing and being as underpinned by the Muslim social praxis and ontological and epistemological basis of existence in Islam (Al-Attas, 2005; Graham, 2007).

⁴ Sunan At-Tirmidhi: 2687

⁵ Quran, 51:56

⁶ Quran, 2:30

1.4. Preparing For Project

There were multiple essential steps in the preparation for the project and to ensure the success of the weekend, including:

Organizing an appropriate invitation that would go out to all the attendees of past and present LMA programs:

- This project was initially designed as the final step in the multi-pronged Leadership and Think Tank initiatives with the LMA, and as providing a final opportunity for contribution to the participants. However it was soon expanded to accommodate the changes in the participation levels of both teams.
- The invitation was initially distributed via email, as this was the first point of contact with most of the participants of previous LMA projects. From there, attendees were followed up upon and we ensured they were aware of all aspects of the project and were available for the weekend.
- We also provided a \$100 reimbursement to all attendees who were there for both days, as repayment for the time they have allocated to the project. We hoped this would provide incentive to the attendees to attend both days

and provide the project with the consistency in attendance it demanded.

Ensuring that the attendees and their contributions are recorded:

- This involved using the LMA's resources to make sure all the essential contributions of the attendees were recorded for reporting purposes as well as in the situation in which an expansion of the report would require it.
- Two of the three breakout rooms had cameras in them that recorded both audio and vision, and one break out room had an audio recorder.
- Ensuring that the appropriate supplies are acquired
- This included butchers paper, pens and markers, and was requested by the facilitators as the appropriate means by which discussion could be incited on the issues selected by the attendees.

Ensuring the spaces used are set up appropriately, in consultation with the facilitators:

- This was also done in consultation with the facilitators as there were events running concurrently at the LMA and as such, required

an understanding of the available space and how best to use it.

- In use for the weekend was the board room, and three classrooms from the Quran College, one level up from the LMA offices. This was in accordance with the requests of the facilitators, in regards to uses of tables, chairs and projectors.

Ensuring the availability of food to the attendees and facilitators and that all dietary considerations are met:

- The main dietary requirement was that the food was halal and had some variety for those that sought healthy options. Food was purchased from local pizzeria Pizza Land, and had an ensured halal certification.

Furthermore, steps needed to be taken to ensure that the facilitators were being catered to, including:

- Ensuring accommodation was local and appropriate
- Ensuring flights were booked in advance and the facilitators schedules were kept in consideration
- Ensuring transport and food was all catered for



02 Implementation Strategy

2.1. Research Design

This project utilised a multi-method approach that involves collecting and analysing quantitative (surveys) and qualitative data (focus groups) (Creswell, 2009; Teddlie & Tashkori, 2003). Both surveys and focus groups were conducted to attain the aims and objectives expected from the forum. This approach generated from participants important key areas that demanded attention relating to Muslim young people, and for participants to generate realistic initiatives to better the Muslim community and its members. This was important given that the participants represented the potential benefactors of these initiatives when effected. Consequently, information collected from a short survey was used to inform the theme-related focus group discussions of the forum.

2.2. Procedure

A two-step process was used to collect data for the forum objectives. The preliminary survey informed the themes to be discussed in the forum focus groups. An information sheet about the purpose of the forum was supplied and informed consent procedures implemented. Follow-up phone calls and emails were made to increase participation from those Muslim youth who had not responded to the official invitation, and to remind participants close to the date of the forum.

2.2.1. SURVEYS

Participants were emailed a short preliminary survey that asked them to nominate six concerns that were relevant to them as young Muslims living in South-Western Sydney. Surveys are straight-forward, cost effective, convenient and ideal for asking opinions and views (Neuman, 2006; Schwartz, 2000). Data collected was then collated to identify six main themes to be addressed in the focus group discussions.

2.2.2. FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were the main methodology utilised to gather thoughts and ideas from participants. The qualitative research method of focus groups has been found to be useful for developing ideas and strategies for prevention programs (Wolf, 2003). Following feedback from participants on their six themes they felt



were most relevant to Muslim youth, the top six were selected. Participants were divided into six groups that addressed the respective themes.

The focus group sessions were held on-site at the LMA premises with LMA staff members always in attendance. Participants self-selected to participate in two focus groups spanning across the Saturday and Sunday when the sessions were conducted. Their participation in the focus groups involved engaging active culturally diverse young Muslims to:

- explore the current challenges that young Muslims face in South-Western Sydney;
- apply strength-based approach (SBA) to generate effective initiatives that address these challenges;
- operate within TOR (see Section 1.3 for further details) that act as parameters for an Islamic worldview; and
- recognise their privileged voice.

During registration for the forum, informed consent procedures were implemented that ensured voluntary participation and anonymity. Following an introduction and ice-breaking session to the forum, the first method of the Yarning Circle to be utilised in Day 1 was explained by one of the facilitators. The participants were then split into their

self-selected groups (which covered the topics 'family relationships'; 'identity & belonging'; and 'dating & partner relationships'). Each session lasted 2.5 hours in total with a break in between. Using the Yarning Circle method, each group was led by a facilitator who had previous research experience in facilitating groups and who had familiarity of the context of Muslim youth. Consequently, the facilitators engaged in the participatory nature of the project given the shared worldview with participants that act as parameters of their Islamic worldview, thereby contributing expertise and a shared decision making process.

For Day 2 of the forum, de Bono's six thinking hats method was used which was explained to participants prior to the splitting of the self-selected groups (which covered the topics 'Bullying, Peer Pressure & online issues'; 'Education & Employment'; and 'Mental Health & Emotional Well-being'). The de Bono method was enhanced by the usage of the Yarning Circle on Saturday during group discussions as it grounded participants in their worldview which subsequently enabled them to generate initiatives that were within their TOR. In complying with the TOR utilised, the facilitators' consistency in facilitation was achieved by prior mock runs of the two methods. Participants also completed a short, anonymous written evaluation form at the end of the sessions both days.

2.3. Data Analysis

Each session was video/audio-recorded for transcription purposes. Data from the group discussions were thematically analysed to identify issues and initiatives, and the strengths and challenges of respective initiatives derived that sought to address the respective issues. Code words were developed and defined by the facilitators (who are researchers) to organise data by themes, a process that facilitates the summarisation of large amounts of qualitative data (Seidel *et al.*, 1994).

2.4. Participants

Young Muslims who were involved with LMA through their youth programs or as volunteers participated in the focus groups. Purposive sampling techniques were used in the selection of participants for the focus groups. These participants were young Muslims: (a) 17 - 28 years old, (b) resided in South-Western Sydney, NSW and (c) were actively involved in either an organisation or Muslim youth related issues. To compose the sampling framework, participants from the Youth Think Tank, Youth Leadership,

Positive Intellect Program (PIP), Community Upskill Initiative and LMA youth volunteers were contacted. A total of 21 participants responded from various ethnic backgrounds and were allocated into self-selected theme-groups for the purpose of the forum, with each group ranging between four and seven participants for an optimum outcome (Barbour, 2007). The participants covered a diverse range of cultural groups to provide a broad range of views.

The advantage of having participants consisting of active Muslim youth instead of ordinary youth of the community is that active Muslim youth know that they are invited because they represent their respective youth groups and understand the challenges and social contexts that young Muslims face and realise the need to address these challenges. Drawing the participants from the programs mentioned above ensured a culturally diverse population of young Muslims with experience of knowledge of varying social contexts. A monetary remuneration of \$100 was given to each participant at the conclusion of the forum in recognition of their valuable time and input.

TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

NAME	GENDER	ETHNICITY	EDUCATION
Zac Rea	Male	Australian	High school
Mohammed Zreika	Male	Lebanese	University
Walae Chehade	Female	Lebanese	University
Khodr Ghantous	Male	Lebanese	University
Ema Akl	Male	Lebanese	University
Habibi Orlena	Male	Indonesian	University
Amna K Hassan	Female	Lebanese	University
Widyan Al Ubudy	Female	Iraqi	University
Naveen Krissnassamy	Male	Indian	University
Lael Kassem	Female	Lebanese	University
Mohammad Taha	Male	Lebanese	University
Amirah Amin	Female	Egyptian	University
Heba Said	Female	Lebanese	University
Fariza Fatima	Female	Pakistani	University
Fatima ElCheikh	Female	Lebanese	University
Tooba Anwar	Female	Pakistani	High School
Yasmeen Elkodr	Female	Lebanese	University
Zena Kassir	Female	Lebanese	University
Samad Sultan	Male	Pakistani	University
Ali Mehana	Male	Egyptian	University

...active Muslim youth know that they are invited because they represent their respective youth groups and understand the challenges and social contexts that young Muslims face and realise the need to address these challenges.

2.5. Instruments Used

In addition to SBA and TOR strategies informing the approach of the Forward Thinking Forum, two instruments were utilised for data collection purposes that captures the voice of the young Muslims. The two instruments included the Yarning Circle⁷ and de Bono's Thinking Hats⁸ discussed below:

2.5.1. YARNING CIRCLE

The Yarning Circle (Figure 1) has been described as a protocol and a process (Bennet, 1997). The *Yarning Circle* includes four elements, *Fire, Earth, Water* and *Air* which represent milestones that participants worked through in the focus group sessions in Day 1 to arrive at informed initiatives for building and enhancing community capacity. This movement around the Yarning Circle was to represent a journey of learning and self-discovery with the potential to empower the individual and the community (Bennet, 1997).

One of the strengths of the Yarning Circle was that it enabled participants to come together in equal status to listen to each other's stories and perspectives (Bennet, 1997). It recognised the need for a diversity of cultural expressions (Bennet, 1997), offering space for a mediating lens, or filter. It was this space that allowed the Yarning Circle to be adapted to the Muslim community for this Forward Thinking Forum. The space provided the means to infuse the

shared worldview of Islam as the mediating lens or filter. The fact that participants shared a common religious worldview despite high levels of diversity in other markers, meant the vibrancy and diversity of the worldview could be captured without the essence of it being lost (Al-Attas, 2005), allowing participants to operate within their TOR.

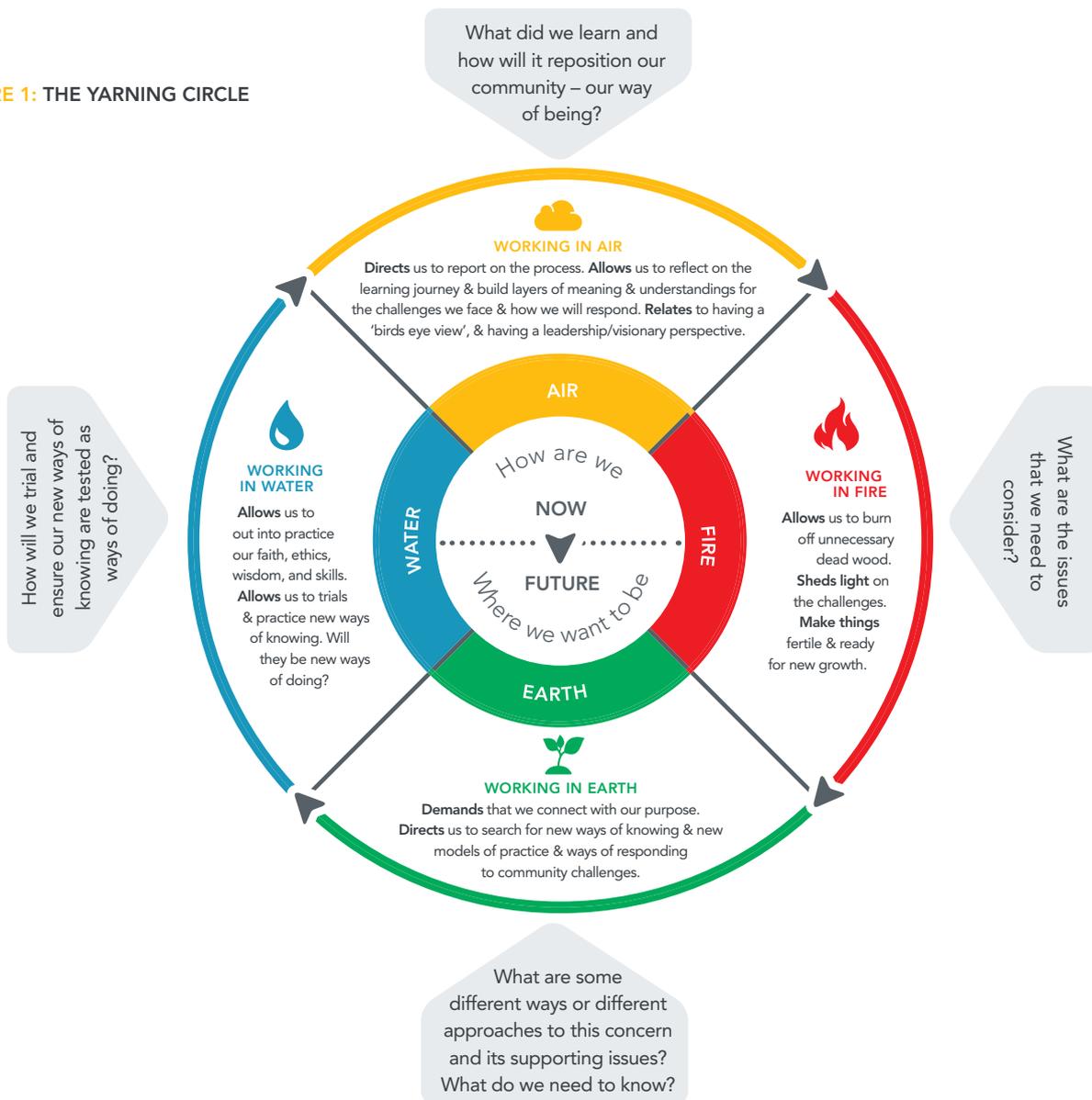
The dynamic wisdom of The Yarning Circle concepts were not viewed as unique to Aboriginal people (Bennet, 1997). Rather, they proved translatable across cultures and within the worldview of Islam as a tool for critical thinking in this forum. The process very much aligned with traditional Islamic scholarship in which *Ulema* (scholars) drew upon legal principles to derive Fatwas (legal non-binding verdicts). Just as ways of knowing informed the ways of doing and being in the Yarning Circle, Islamic scholars drew on Qur'an, Hadith, the body of scholarship, as well as context and intuition to arrive at their verdicts.

The SBA and TOR overarching strategies that informed the approach of the Forward Thinking Forum were also embedded in the Yarning Circle. The Yarning Circle through its healing elements and its starting point of burning off in the fire phase proved to be extremely effective in providing the platform for a SBA. Participants demonstrated a need to burn off non-productive ways of doing

⁷ The Yarning Circle is the invention and lifework of a Goorie woman, Aunty Debra Bennet.

⁸ The Thinking Hats as developed by Edward de Bono.

FIGURE 1: THE YARNING CIRCLE





«

We travel the great circle many times in a lifetime. Our life journey spirals back over itself in ever deepening concentric layers of experience as we move towards the meaning we make of our lives ultimately evolving spheres of wisdom. (Bennet, 1997, p. 9).

things and negative mindsets to move forward which served to change the language and the trajectory from that of a Deficit Model to a SBA. As they moved into the second, earth phase, participants were redirected towards their purpose and refocused toward their ways of knowing and thus their TOR. The subsequent water phase allowed them to conceive of new ways of doing and new initiatives through the filtering effect of the first two phases. In the final phase of air participants engaged in reflective practices that allowed them to refine and assess whether ideas could become a new way of being, meaning an initiative that was authentic on account of being within TOR.

2.5.2. DE BONO'S SIX THINKING HATS

De Bono's (1985) six thinking hats is a process used effectively for brainstorming and decision making. It is driven by the concept of parallel thinking. That is, all participants involved are thinking with the same focus, in a common direction and not opposing one another. Each hat represents a mode of thinking that is used in sequence to guide the process and produces reasonably quick results.

A logical sequence of each hat as used in this project was as follows:



- 1 **BLUE HAT:** plans the process of the session.
- 2 **WHITE HAT:** is about laying out all the facts. In the focus groups, participants brainstormed all the issues and the facts that were needed to be known.
- 3 **GREEN HAT:** is about creatively problem-solving the issues identified.
- 4 **YELLOW HAT:** is about highlighting the strengths of the initiatives proposed in the green hat.

- 5 **BLACK HAT:** is the refining process where defects in the proposed initiatives are brought to the surface so that ways of addressing these defects are embedded into the design of the proposed initiatives.
- 6 **RED HAT:** is about using the human factor to appraise the proposed initiative. Questions posed include: "What is my gut feeling about this proposed initiative?" "What is my intuition about this proposed initiative?" This hat is not about logical thinking; rather it is about involving the human factor to appraise the proposed solution while considering respective social contexts and TOR.
- 7 **BLUE HAT:** The process ends again with this hat to check that the plan and goals for the session were met.

It is important to note that while the above sequencing of thinking hats is a logical process, it is also fluid. Hence facilitators would follow the sequence and sometimes return to a previous hat where necessary. For instance, after highlighting defects in the proposed initiatives whilst under Black hat thinking, the facilitator might return to the Green hat to derive remedies for the defect.

03 Themes & Issues

One focus group was conducted for each of the six themes generated from the survey component of this research. From these 6 themes, participants' highlighted key issues that they wished to discuss in their focus group.

Table 2 summarises the six over-arching themes selected and the nominated issues. As previously mentioned the Saturday session utilised The Yarning Circle instrument to generate respective initiatives for the themes being discussed; while Day 2 utilised the de Bono instrument to facilitate initiatives. The de Bono method is a much more structured approach than the Yarning Circle method. However, it is imperative to bear in mind that the productivity of the de Bono method was informed by the Yarning Circle method that grounded the young Muslims in their TOR reflective of their worldview. This then eased the process of generating initiatives for the topic of discussion as it came from a SBA.





TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF ISSUES IDENTIFIED

THEME	ISSUE
 Family Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disconnect between parents and children• Sibling relationships• Domestic violence
 Dating & Marriage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender segregation confusion• Gender issues• Marriage issues
 Identity & Belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Socio/political/economic/media related issues• Religion related issues• Cultural/environment related issues• Psychological/internal issues
 Education & Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education related issues• Employment related issues
 Bullying, Peer Pressure & Online Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bullying• Online Conduct• Online Bullying• Peer Pressure
 Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of research on mental health among Muslim youth• Transmission of knowledge on mental health and emotional wellbeing to Muslim youth

3.1. Family Relationships

Three predominant issues were identified in the family relationships focus group session:

- Disconnect between parents and children;
- Sibling relationships
- Domestic violence.

Overarching all these issues was the concern of lack of community support for troubled youth and families and the stigma or shaming attached in discussing “private” and/or “hot” topics such as violence, rape, homosexuality, among others.

While discussing the disconnect between parents and children, a number of concerns were raised including the cultural generational differences that creates a barrier between the two; the lack of effort exerted by parents in understanding issues faced by their children; the cultural differences in expression of love that was essential to psychological development; and the disconnect due to the mixing of culture with religion. The young Muslims discussed the variation in interpretations of religion depending on the region-of-origin which then clouded the practice of religion where religion was blurred by cultural interpretations that permeated understanding of the faith.

The issue of sibling relationships was discussed with the least depth though it was seen as an extremely important one. Particularly the issue of boundaries in expressing love between family members guided by cultural norms and bullying amongst siblings that leads to body image issues was voiced. This issue requires further discussion.

Given the lack of time available to discuss all issues on family relationships, the issue that was given most focus during the discussions by the young Muslims was domestic violence. A number of concerns were raised including the restriction in definition; particularly the scope of DV and lack of religious and cultural inclusion and sensitivity in definition. Other concerns raised were the stigma attached to DV as it is viewed as a private topic that should not be discussed outside of the home, the lack of understanding and how to address DV amongst community leaders, the accepting of some forms of abuse within Muslim families, the disconnect between religious and legal definitions of abuse, and the oxymoron of DV and Islam (where Islam is viewed in Western society as contributing towards DV in Muslim families). The initiatives emerging from the discussion of DV is discussed in Section 4.2 below.

3.2. Dating & Marriage

The discussion on dating and marriage identified three key issues. These included:

- Gender segregation confusion
- Gender issues
- Marriage issues.

Dating was a deceptive title as participants were at all times seeking to discuss and meet identified challenges from within their TOR. Rather than advocating for dating, which would fall outside their TOR, participants unpacked issues pertaining to improved facilitation of marriage. They did this with a view to the barriers faced by young Muslims to adhere easily to seemingly polemic cultural and community expectations as well as Islamic parameters.

A general confusion regarding segregation was discussed at length which participants felt had direct impact upon gender and marriage issues as they relate to the community. The participants felt that functional permissible parameters for appropriate gender interaction needed to be formulated and shared widely in the community, specifically with young people. Participants wanted to know their limits as well as their rights and responsibilities within their TOR for appropriate interaction. The blanket segregation at school and community events was said to ignore the contextual reality in which young people find themselves.

The result, participants argued, were disrespectful interactions couched in modesty; a feeling of confusion and guilt when interactions occur – “Did I interact in a halal way?”; a level of dysfunction as different genders cannot easily come together to respond to shared challenges; awkward relationships between the genders that subsequently impacts on marriage; a sense of isolation from the ‘other’ section of the



Participants’ instead wished for safe spaces for appropriate interaction within the community and clearer distinction between cultural dogma and religious parameters.

community, meaning the opposite sex, such that the process of marriage participants felt was that of an arranged marriage. Participants’ instead wished for safe spaces for appropriate interaction within the community and clearer distinction between cultural dogma and religious parameters.

Considerable time was spent on gender issues as they related to healthy relationships and thus healthy marriages. Participants spoke of a patriarchal community that perpetuated animosity towards independent, well-educated and dynamic women. Equally, participants felt men were afforded a very narrow frame for manliness and that there were few role models

for young men in the community. Moreover, the language used openly in the community by men when referring to women was said to reflect the cycle of apathy towards gender issues. All of the above were considered as challenges impacting negatively on the path to getting married; on participants' view of marriage; and on perceived happiness within marriages.



Participants were concerned about the divisions within the Muslim community and what impact that had on identity and belonging.

The segregation and gender issues provided a complex interplay with the primary issue of marriage. Participants expressed a unanimous feeling of being ill-equipped to fulfil the purpose of marriage within their TOR. They identified the dysfunctional relationships between the genders emanating from cultural and patriarchal norms as responsible for the lack of friendship and love they observed in marriages amongst friends, family and within

the community. Added to this was the threat of divorce which participants stated some men levelled at their wives. Participants were of the view that some men did this consciously and knowingly as they felt cultural factors meant divorce in the community impacts disproportionately on women. The female participants raised the concern of what they termed "halal cheating" or taking a second wife without telling the first wife. The threat of taking a second wife and the trauma this caused the marital relationship was also a concern raised amongst participants. Also, participants felt the scientific and mechanical method of teaching sex within families, Islamic schools and the community was limiting; and further that it served to objectify sex within marriage. Overwhelmingly, participants identified a lack of knowledge in the community, especially amongst young people, to facilitate healthy marriages. They expressed the need in the community to learn about the Prophetic example of marriage. More specifically, participants called for a "Prophetic pedagogy of love", which they viewed as necessary in order to infuse Prophetic teachings and understandings of love, compassion, mercy and gratitude.

3.3. Identity & Belonging

The issues raised in this session were many and far encompassing. Participants were asked to group issues together to better discuss them. The categories concluded were:

- Socio/political/economic/media
- Religion
- Cultural/environmental factors
- Psychological internal factors.

3.3.1. SOCIO/POLITICAL/ECONOMIC/MEDIA RELATED ISSUES

The socio-political climate in Australia was a marked factor pertaining to its impact on the issue of identity and belonging. Acts like those of Muslim violent extremists (domestically and internationally) also affects the misrepresentation of Muslims. However, other factors play a significant role to misrepresent Muslims. For instance, the media broadcast anti-Muslim propaganda and sentiments, which leads to Muslim mistrust of the media and a misinformed general public opinion about Islam and Muslims. Politics also contributes toward the misrepresentation of Muslims. For example, Prime Minister Tony Abott, and Australian Senator Jacqui Lambie utilise political rhetoric. Their opinions are based on ignorance, and a lack of understanding. Race hate groups also fuel anti-Muslim sentiments. An outcome of this kind of sentiment that participants raised was bullying; which can occur due to their religion or on a sidenote,

due to their race. In this current domestic climate, participants felt that racism and Islamophobia are increasing and that this impacting on identity and belonging. The impact this has on identity and belonging are several. Participants did not have enough time to elaborate on this. However some corollaries include Muslims not feeling welcome in Australia or suffering from identity confusion, questioning their Australian identity.

3.3.2. RELIGION RELATED ISSUES

Participants were concerned about the divisions within the Muslim community and what impact that had on identity and belonging. Such divisions were seen to be rife. For example, divisions between *sunni* and *shia* was mentioned. Divisions within Sunni Islam was also mentioned. Hizbut Tahrir was raised as one such group in *sunni* Islam that was causing divisions within the Muslim community. Participants emphasised that it is necessary to rely on our common TOR by maintaining a close connection with Islam's historical tradition (*Quran* and *Sunnah*) to navigate the divisions within our community. In relation to these concerns, several needs were highlighted for young Muslims in Australia. There is a need to understand different ideologies within Islam, as well as allegiances, and to accept the diversity of ideologies. Further to this, there is a need to reduce uncritical following of sects and groups and embrace diversity and Islamic pluralism.

3.3.3. CULTURAL/ENVIRONMENTAL RELATED ISSUES

Another area that leads to identity and belonging issues is culture. Young people in Australia need to reconcile many identities including occupational, Australian, Islamic and ethnic identities (if hailing from immigrant backgrounds). There is no clear answer to how these identities can be reconciled. Possible points of confusion may include the detachment from the ethnic culture of one's immigrant parents; or whether one needs to assimilate or integrate with Australian culture or whether hyphenated identities are acceptable. Some might believe it is unacceptable to assimilate or integrate; participants thought this was not conducive towards healthy identity development. Resolving identity issues become more difficult due to their complex nature. As a result, some young Muslims do not challenge the status quo due to fear of rejection, isolation, normalisation, acceptance, or not feeling they deserve better.

Immigrant parents may try to impose certain identities on their children. This could include expectations like becoming a doctor or engineer. More relevant however, parents may impose on their children to retain their ethnic identities and cultural baggage and disown any Australian-ness they might identify with. Parents may feel that their culture is superior to

others like Australian culture. Participants felt that this equates to parents failing to nurture secure identities for their children.

Parental influences are not alone in contributing towards issues in identity development. Living in Muslim enclaves leads to Muslims only identifying with their ethnic or religious culture and not with wider Australia. This can be a natural preference as mixing with and living around only Muslims can be quite natural due to issues like familiarity (in terms language, religion, world view) and hence convenience. However this may in turn lead to such individuals not embracing their Australian identities.

Participants highlighted that in order to reach a healthy identity, young Muslims, their immigrant parents, and mainstream Australians need to know how culture can evolve. Currently a significant proportion of non-Muslim Australians and immigrants believe that their culture cannot evolve according to the diverse multiculturalism or Australian society or the fact that 2nd generation Australians don't identify with their ethnic cultural backgrounds.

3.3.4. PSYCHOLOGICAL/INTERNAL ISSUES

Whilst the identity crises that young Muslims face in Australia has been alluded to in previous paragraphs, participants wished to expand

on the impact of this identity crisis. There is a fear that the way young people reconcile with their identity crisis may not be acceptable to others such as their parents, imams or non-Muslim Australians (peers or members of the general public). The by-product of this internal conflict is low self-esteem, anger, confusion, depression, feeling disheartened, low self-esteem, victimisation mentality, self-loathing alienation/disenfranchisement, isolation, trust issues, defensiveness, mental illness, anti-social behaviour and mentality, criminalisation, hopelessness/helplessness, self-destructive behaviour, drug use, sexualisation.

3.4. Education & Employment

This theme was subdivided into issues pertaining to education and issues pertaining to employment.

3.4.1. EDUCATION RELATED ISSUES

Participants pointed out that education institutes do not teach holistic development. There is not only a need for academic education but there is also a need for other forms of education that enhance emotional regulation and well-being, social skills, resilience, self-esteem, and personal development.



There is not only a need for academic education but there is also a need for other forms of education that enhance emotional regulation and well-being, social skills...and personal development.





Further to this there are problems of retention rates at universities. One factor for this could be that some Muslim scholars say HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme) is haram. Another factor for this may be related to women needing to do household duties and hence can't afford enough time to complete university, or the idea that women should stop studying or working once married could be a factor. Finally, having too many responsibilities at once can lead to burnout and work-life imbalance.

3.4.2. EMPLOYMENT RELATED ISSUES

The main challenge that participants highlighted was unemployment. Unemployment is a big issue whereby according to the last census, Muslim unemployment (12%) is double the national average (5%). Many Muslims are on welfare and there are several possible reasons for this. Possibly they lack direction, or they do not have or seize opportunities to advance their career prospects, or they have a fear of failure, or they lack motivation, or are rejected when they seek out employment (which is possibly due to discrimination). Participants felt there were not enough services designed to assist Muslims find employment easily accessible by Muslims, like networking opportunities.

3.5. Bullying, Peer Pressure, & Online Issues

A bullying definition was provided as a stimulus for discussion which was subsequently agreed upon as the operational definition. It was said that bullying involves the intention to harm, plus harmful action, plus an imbalance of power, plus an unjust use of power, with evident enjoyment by the aggressor, plus a feeling of being oppressed by the victim, that is typically repeated (Rigby, 2002). Further, it was discussed that there are three (3) or more people to consider in instances of bullying: the bully; the bullied; and the bystander. The stages of bullying were also discussed, being latent, emerging and manifest (O'Toole, Burton, and Plunket, 2005). Latent referred to subtle forms of bullying largely under the surface; emerging referred to bullying impacting on the victim with a low level of awareness by others; and manifest referred to open bullying in which other people were either involved in, perpetuating or complicity silent (O'Toole, Burton, and Plunket, 2005).

As the focus group discussion progressed, bullying, peer pressure and online issues began to overlap. Participants subsequently identified bullying as the overarching issue and online conduct as well as bullying occurring in online spaces as a corollary of this. Peer pressure

was said to be a possible determining factor underlying all the issues. Further discussion revolved around the need to know more about peer pressure theory. The participants identified that peer pressure could also be a positive and enabling factor. The issues were thus:

- Bullying
 - Online conduct
 - Bullying online
- (Peer pressure as a causal and enabling factor)

The participants identified the absence of research informing these issues as they impact on the local Muslim community. They expressed a need for research on forms of bullying, incidence, causal factors, and level of reporting. Participants were unsure as to whether they would be different from mainstream statistics and findings. Gender based bullying concerns specific to the community were raised, especially in online spaces. The practice of shaming girls by posting covered girls uncovered online was mentioned as one way young boys were engaging in bullying. Only anecdotal evidence was discussed regarding this practice as well as in instances of ethnic or sectarian based bullying. Participants felt this evidence base was very important to informing potential initiatives within the community. In addition to research of this kind, consideration of what evidence based initiatives had been effective

elsewhere was highlighted. Participants were adamant that both presentation and intervention based initiatives were required.

In formulating initiatives, participants discussed the need to increase the level of knowledge amongst young people regarding issues of bullying. A specific example of this was the need for increased awareness of the new laws pertaining to online conduct. Accompanying increased knowledge, participants identified the need to develop young people's personal skills; firstly, to equip them to be active bystanders in bullying situations, in person or online. Secondly, to negotiate online and social media spaces safely and within the community's TOR for ethical conduct and appropriate *adab* (etiquette).

An unexpected discussion emerged which revolved around instances of conflict between leaders, groups and organisations within the community. When participants applied such instances of conflict up against the operational definition for bullying, they found that they met the criteria. Further, participants felt that often this type of bullying in the community was at the manifest stage. This was identified as a critical area to address within the community.

3.6. Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being

The discussion on mental health and emotional well-being was initiated with an operational definition of mental health and emotional well-being. The participants agreed that emotional well-being and psychological states regulated mental health. Therefore to address mental health it was important to address emotional well-being which was viewed as being influenced by physical well-being and environmental factors (family, work, friends, etc.). The absence of healthy emotional well-being was viewed as causing sleep disorders, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders, self-harm, among others. The factors identified as influencing emotional well-being included drugs/alcohol; environment – specifically dysfunctional families, peer pressure, high expectations and trauma (illness, death of loved ones, and bad experiences); and personal traits such as loneliness, boredom, isolation and identity-related concerns.

The participants identified that there was a lack of knowledge about the extent of mental health issues in the Muslim community and as such the need to rectify this. There was also a strong identification of lack of knowledge about mental health and emotional well-being among young Muslims which required initiatives to address these needs.



The participants identified that there was a lack of knowledge about the extent of mental health issues in the Muslim community and as such the need to rectify this.

As a result, the group were in consensus that the focus of the group discussions was to generate initiatives (discussed in Section 4. below) that would address two main issues

- the lack of evidence-based research in the Muslim community on mental health; and
- the transmission of knowledge/skills related to healthy emotional well-being to young Muslims between 13-25 years old.



04 Participant Initiatives



In section 3, issues pertaining to the six most prominent themes participant felt in their surveys were most relevant to Muslim youth were explored. Section 4 will discuss the initiatives generated by participants in their sessions.

Table 3 summarises the initiatives generated in sessions. Given the variation in the instruments or measures used in Day 1 and Day 2 to collect data (i.e. the Yarning Circle and de Bono Thinking hats), naturally the process of generating initiatives would vary. Consequently, where themes utilised the Yarning Circle method, results are presented accordingly to reflect the process. Figure 2 illustrates the process taken in the Yarning Circle on the theme of Dating and Marriage and related issues proposed in section 4.2. Similarly, where the initiatives were generated using the de Bono thinking hats, which is a more structured approach, the results are accordingly presented to reflect this more regulated approach. Figure 3 illustrated the ideas generated in each of the de Bono thinking hats. This example is in relation to the “Muslim Co-Curricular Association” proposed in section 4.6.3.1.



TABLE 3: SUMMARY OF INITIATIVES GENERATED

THEME	INITIATIVES
 <p>Family Relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train the trainer approach to imams training • Alternative options to Imams • Role models/social media in DV campaigns and DV education • Pre-marital workshops • Public board messages • Bystander (who can intervene in DV) initiatives • Marriage fitness
 <p>Dating & Marriage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social hubs and safe spaces • Supportive groups facilitating recreational activities • Life coaching • Theatre of the Oppressed – unpacking issues (gender; generation gap; healthy marriages) in the safe medium of drama • Community based sex-education programs • Marriage support
 <p>Identity & Belonging</p>	<p>Socio/political/economic/media related issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim public affairs council • Political representation <p>Religion related issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller Positive Intellect Program (PIP) (Train the trainers format) <p>Cultural/environment related issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentorship programs • Public awareness campaigns • The Australian Race

TABLE 3: CONTINUED

THEME	INITIATIVES
 <p>Education & Employment</p>	<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim Co-Curricular Association • Academic competitions • Helping kids value education via parents • Embedding value of knowledge in various contexts • Fatwa on HECS • Islamic scholarship • ASPIRE <p>Employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job readiness programs • Promote 'in-home childcare' • Work experience opportunities • Awards for career building pursuits • Networking event • Career expos
 <p>Bullying, Peer Pressure & Online Issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic Multifaceted Bullying Campaign • Social Experiment • Theatre of the Oppressed – Enhanced Forum Theatre • Community Mediation
 <p>Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being</p>	<p>Knowledge transmission: Social media initiatives (visual aids and catch phrases)</p> <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Role models to publicise mental health issues • Utilise professionals well-versed in mental health issues • Showcase survivor stories <p>Programs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminars, workshops, active role-play and activities led by mental health professionals <p>Lack of evidence-base</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys – that incorporate Islamic worldview to survey young Muslims about understandings of mental health and services they access • Focus groups to drill into issues of mental health

FIGURE 2: THE YARNING CIRCLE PROCESS EXAMPLE: DATING & MARRIAGE

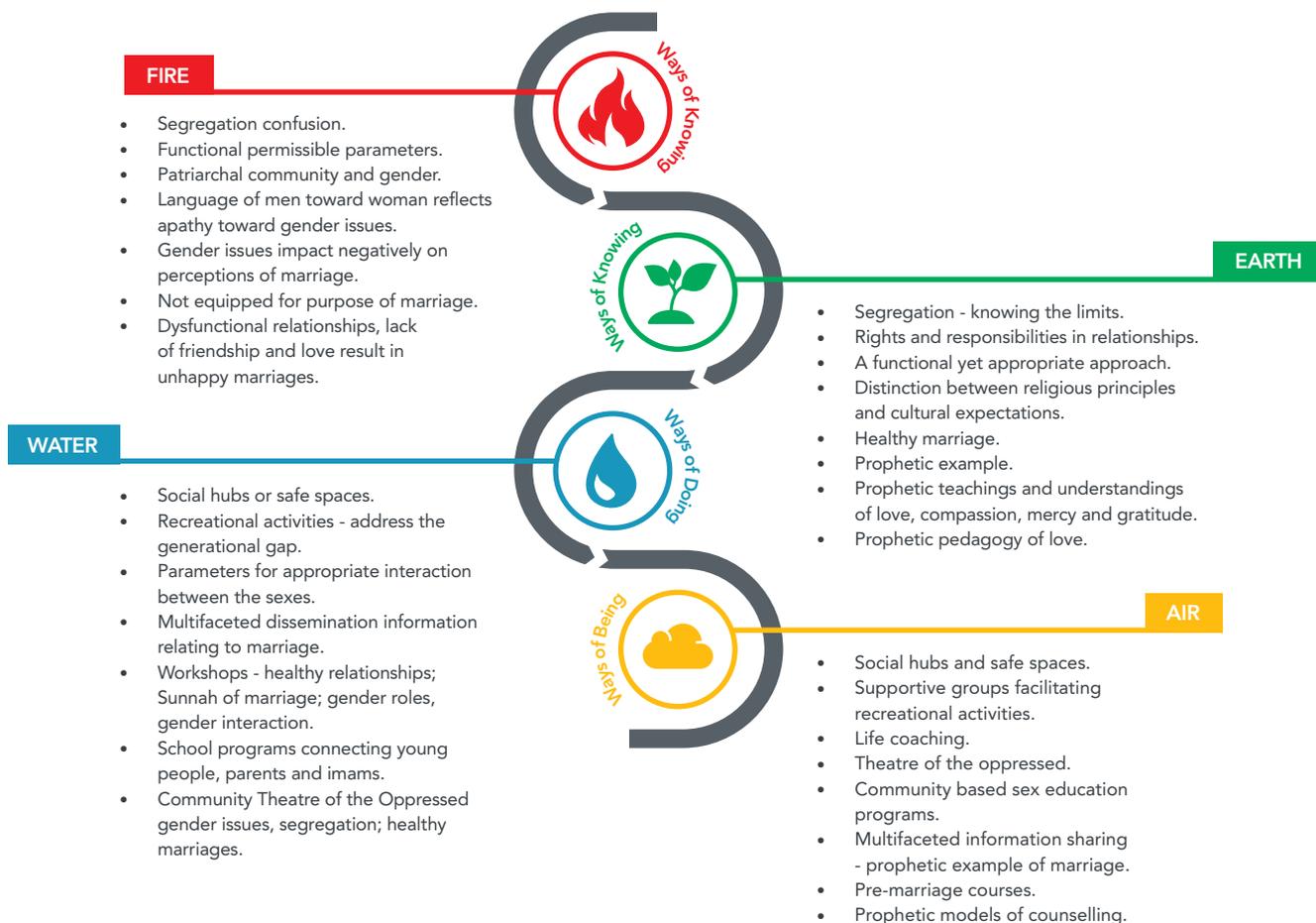
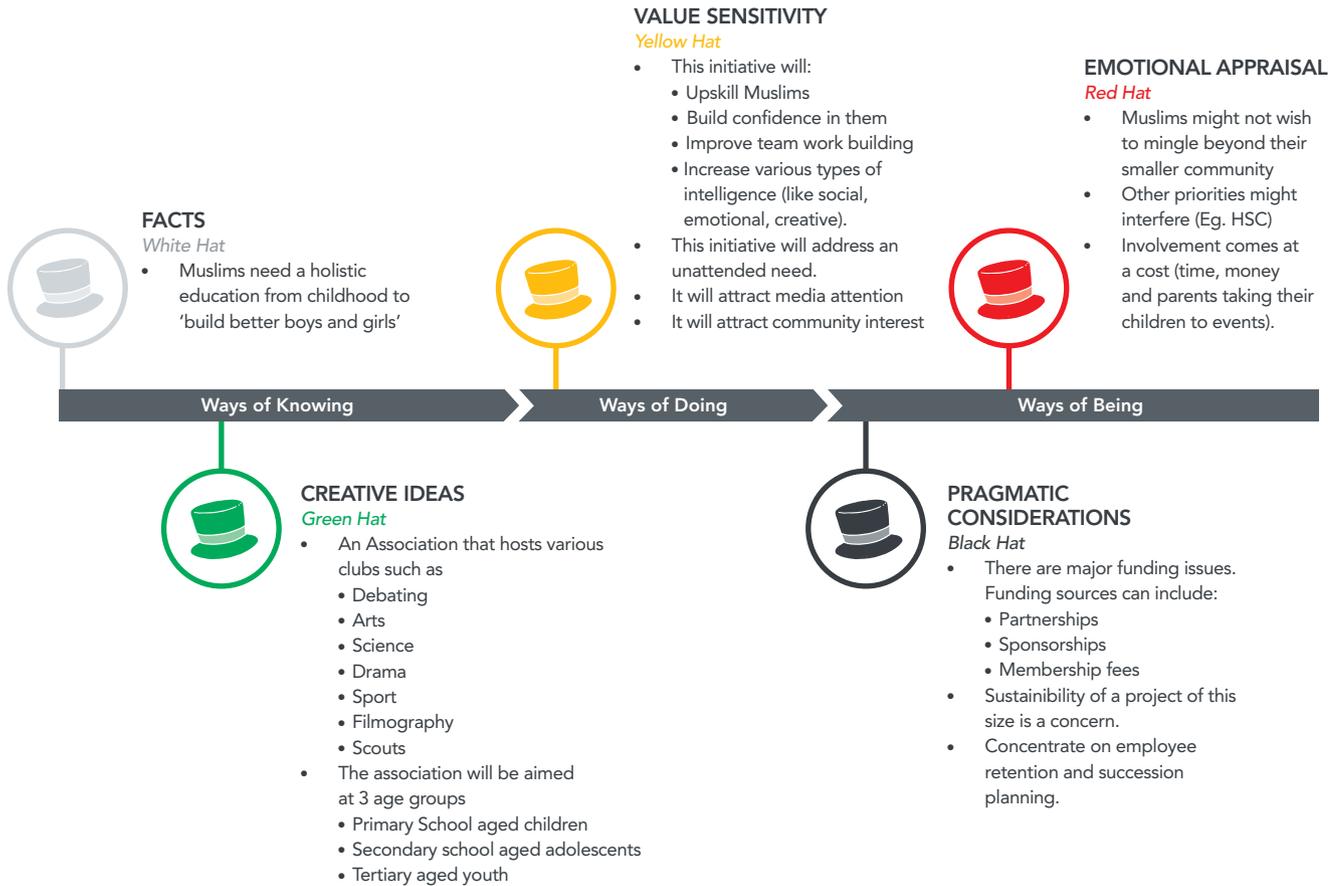


FIGURE 3: DE BONO THINKING HATS PROCESS EXAMPLE: MUSLIM CO-CURRICULAR ASSOCIATION



4.1. Family Relationships

In addressing the issue of domestic violence under family relationships, a number of initiatives were generated by the youth in the focus group discussions. The participants discussed initiatives such as White Ribbon Day, regular Khutbas, and Social media video campaigns (e.g. like the one done recently by LMA). A number of initiatives were generated by the participants through their discussions that though they require further discussions in its design, it nevertheless is based on three overarching principles: empowerment, Islam as the TOR and changing behaviour rather than blaming.

TRAIN THE TRAINER APPROACH TO IMAMS' TRAINING

The participants expressed the need for Imams to have consistent training on DV issues and strategies to address these issues. The Imams must be held accountable for how they address DV. This requires that the National Imams Council create policies that ensure transparency and implement increased communication strategies.

OPTIONS OUTSIDE OF IMAMS

The participants recognised that there would be some survivors/victims that would not want to go to Imams for DV issues. Hence, they expressed the need to look at alternatives in

addressing DV. Here services that collaborated in a community-coordinated response were proposed.

ROLE MODELS/SOCIAL MEDIA IN DV CAMPAIGNS & DV EDUCATION

This initiative in particular was viewed as changing the direction of the discourse on DV related to Muslims where the shift would be towards behaviour rather than faith. The participants strongly expressed the importance of de-bunking the seeming association between Islam and DV, instead highlighting Islam as condemning DV.

Also raised was the debunking of myths surrounding the consequences of DV to create awareness about these issues within the Muslim community and facilitate open discussion.

PRE-MARTIAL WORKSHOPS

The participants expressed that need for pre-martial workshops that would incorporate information on DV, be endorsed by Imams and be delivered by professionals.

PUBLIC BOARD MESSAGES

Small scale initiatives were proposed by participants where people would post messages on a board or giant post-it on DV to educate, create awareness and inform the public about DV.

BYSTANDER INITIATIVES

Workshops that empower bystanders to interrupt DV incidents, generate community support to condemn DV and generate community responsibility to protect DV victims were proposed.

MARRIAGE FITNESS

Practical workshops that are designed to encourage marriage fitness were another initiative proposed by participants. This requires further discussion.

4.2. Dating & Marriage

In the focus group discussion on dating and marriage, a number of initiatives were discussed targeting gender segregation confusion as well as gender and marriage issues. All of the initiatives generated were based on the intention to operate and be functional within TOR; improved clarity between seemingly polemic cultural and community expectations and Islamic principles and TOR; and the addressing of the generational gap in order to bring stakeholders (young people, parents, learned people and Imams) together on issues of appropriate segregation and gender and marriage issues.

SOCIAL HUBS & SAFE SPACES

Participants felt the development of social hubs and safe spaces for social interaction within the community was important in order

to provide appropriate environments for young people to develop interpersonal skills. This didn't necessarily mean the building of new physical structures, rather the provision of safe spaces and opening up of hubs within existing community spaces, including the Mosque and community centres. With the involvement of older community members and learned people, leaders and Imams such hubs could act as appropriate spaces for social gathering. It was viewed that this would also create spaces for learning, not necessarily in a formal sense, but through example and application of appropriate social skills for healthy friendships and relationship within the same sex as well as for appropriate and purposeful interaction within TOR between the sexes. Annexed to this initiative was the need expressed for the formulation of functional permissible parameters for appropriate gender interaction. Participants hoped for increased involvement and more open discussion with Imams on this issue. They described a very "black and white" approach which was unhelpful to the "world of grey" they existed in. What participants were emphasising was the strong intention to remain within TOR and they felt functional parameters to mediate the necessary interactions would only enhance this as well as the nature of interactions, which had a follow on effect on how women were viewed in the community as well as the nature of relationships within marriage.

SUPPORTIVE GROUPS FACILITATING RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Participants felt a necessary initiative was for the planning of consistent and ongoing recreational activities within the community from supportive groups, including LMA. To enhance sustainability, it was suggested that multiple partners in the community work together to share capacity and create an annual timetable of activities. This initiative would enhance the development of community hubs and safe social spaces; improve the knowledge and personal skills of young people regarding interpersonal relationships as well as respond to the perceived generational gap through inclusion of all ages and parents and families in certain activities. It was also viewed as a means of promoting interest amongst young people for mentoring and life coaching, theatre of the oppressed, community sex education programs and marriage support initiatives.

LIFE COACHING

Life coaching services was an initiative put forth by participants to empower young people in negotiating challenges. It was conceived that life coaching could guide young people in adding clarity to the sometimes polemic cultural and community expectations and Islamic parameters and TOR; in young people preparing for and feeling equipped to enter marriage; could offer advice and guidance to communicate with family better, especially

in looking for a marriage partner; could consistently direct them to relevant sources of learning such as community programs and workshops to enhance their ability to operate within TOR.

THEATRES OF THE OPPRESSED

The Theatre of the Oppressed initiative involved the use of enhanced forum theatre technique in the community. This theatre technique would see contemporary community issues such as gender issues, generation gap, cultural versus religion and expectations within marriage, portrayed in the safe medium of drama. The audience which would contain all sections of the community would be asked to actively unpack the drama scenarios and even enter the play to resolve it. The initiative was thought to be an effective means of generating discussion, increasing understanding of different community stakeholder positions as well as offer viable and practical solutions in a non-confrontational medium. It was envisaged as a preventative measure to address the entrenched socio-cultural notions of gender roles and expectations impacting negatively on relationships.

COMMUNITY BASED SEX EDUCATION PROGRAMS

An initiative to develop community based sex education programs was discussed in the focus group. This initiative was to adopt a SBA and an alternative to the mechanical and scientific sex education model predominating in families

and community. Rather, this initiative was to develop a sex education program within the community's TOR, thereby drawing from Prophetic teachings. A focus of the program was a "Prophetic Pedagogy of Love" to empower both individuals within marriages, to build healthier relationships within marriage and to direct people back to the purpose of marriage within TOR.

MARRIAGE SUPPORT

- Multifaceted information sharing
- Prophetic example of marriage
- Pre-marriage courses
- Prophetic models of counselling

An initiative involving more holistic marriage support was discussed at length. The initiative was to assist those preparing for marriage as well as those already married. It was viewed as a marriage enhancing or preventative measure as well as a potential intervention for a challenging period within a marriage. The initiative would include multifaceted information sharing, including on the Prophetic example of marriage, pre-marriage courses infused and encased within TOR as well as Prophetic models of counselling both to foster and nurture healthy marriages and to respond appropriately when intervention is necessary.

4.3. Identity & Belonging

Initiatives and strategies will now be discussed according to their respective categories (Socio/political/economic/media, spiritual, cultural/environmental). Initiatives addressing psychological internal factors were not discussed in sessions.

MUSLIM PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

There is a need to build trust, engagement and healthy relationships with the media, as well as reduce political rhetoric and reduce Islamophobia. This can be addressed through several strategies. For example, a Muslim Public Affairs Council that lobbies for Muslims, hiring spokespeople within the Muslim community and funding litigation is needed. Political representation is also needed. Strengths and weaknesses of these initiatives could not be discussed.

MINI POSITIVE INTELLECT PROGRAM

There is a need for Islamic knowledge throughout the Muslim community. Further there is a need to understand and accept the diversity of Muslim groups. And finally there is a need to correct the idea of Muslims secluding themselves within their own groups.

A smaller version of the Positive Intellect Program (PIP) delivered by students of the PIP through a 'train the trainers' course will

address this need. This will educate Muslims and increase tolerance and acceptance of different subgroups in the Muslim community. This is a viable, low cost solution.

THE AUSTRALIAN RACE

There is a need for our youth to develop a harmonious, secure, self-determined identity that incorporated an Australian identity. This can be achieved through mentorship programs, public awareness campaigns on social media. It can also be done through co-operative contact between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians through an adaptation of “the amazing race” that would be called “the Australian race” which is also a play on word emphasizing, Muslims and non-Muslims can both be Australian. This would involve pairing up a Muslim Australian with a non-Muslim Australian and they do tasks similar to those done in the amazing race. This does not need to be filmed. But the strategy will establish co-operative contact that fosters a greater understanding of the other person. This will assist a Muslim in identity development (specifically integrating an Australian identity). Furthermore this will assist the non-Muslim participant to see Muslims more objectively and thereby reduce racism and Islamophobia.



4.4. Education & Employment

A number of initiatives were generated by participants, which are summarised immediately below. Three (3) initiatives were discussed in more depth and are discussed in detail in Section 4.4.3

4.4.1. SUMMARY OF INITIATIVES REGARDING EDUCATION

- Introduce parents to instilling children with the concept of valuing education.
- Education competitions
- Embedding focus on valuing knowledge in high school religious studies ('Scripture') and Madrassas (adapt from PIP)
- Discuss value of knowledge in kutbhas, workshops, conferences (Use a very controversial name to attract interest like 'Deen or degree?' or 'Is university education haram?') and invite speakers from different sub groups like Deobands, Salafies etc.
- Research fatwas from ANIC that permit HECS.
- Islamic scholarship.
- Lobby for free education.
- Aspire program

4.4.2. SUMMARY OF INITIATIVES REGARDING EMPLOYMENT

- Promote 'in-home care' to be utilised by mothers pursuing education or work.
- Create opportunities for relevant work experience
- Awards for proactive career building pursuits before graduation
- Leadership programs in career development, project management, spiritual development
- Networking events
- Career expos that engage with existing expos

4.4.3. INITIATIVES DISCUSSED IN MORE DEPTH

Several initiatives were discussed in greater depth. They are the 'Muslim Co-Curricular Association', academic competitions and job readiness initiatives. Each initiative will now be discussed.

1 Muslim Co-Curricular Association

DESCRIPTION

There is a need to 'build better boys' and 'grow greater girls' i.e. offer a holistic education to our Muslims. This initiative is an association that hosts various clubs such as debating, arts, science, drama, sport, filmography, scouts. It is aimed at 3 levels, primary school aged children, high school aged adolescents, and tertiary aged young adults.

STRENGTHS

This solution is viable, it will upskill Muslim children and builds confidence in them.

CHALLENGES

The considerations to bear in mind are funding issues (try partnerships, sponsorships, membership fees), and sustainability (need to focus on worker retention and succession planning).

2 Academic Competitions

DESCRIPTION

There is a need for our children and youth to value education. This need can be addressed by organising academic competitions. LMA or other organisation can host academic competitions such as in science, writing, poetry, reading marathons, mathematics, arts (painting, drama) fashion, film/cinema, and photography.

STRENGTHS

This creates a vibrant community. It is something that isn't being done currently. It will nurture the Muslim community and its children and youth. It will attract positive perceptions, both internally and externally

CHALLENGES

Considerations to bear in mind include funding and sustainability (sponsorship, participant fees, marketing, and persistence, marketing entries into competitions.) There may also be a slow uptake to this initiative.

3 Job Readiness

DESCRIPTION

Unemployment and hurdles to find employment are a problem in our community. This can be addressed by creating a series of services that will assist our young people to get employed. This will involve programs like toastmasters, leadership development, CV building tutoring, networking events, awards for people who develop themselves career wise at an early stage (end of high school or early university for instance), mock aptitude tests and workplace environments. This will start from year 10.

STRENGTHS

This will upskill the Muslim community, reduce marginalisation, give relevant experience, facilitate networking, and stop self-fulfilling prophecies to do with unemployment.

CHALLENGES:

Considerations involve building partnerships, time lag to get this initiative up and running sustainability and industry crowding.

4 Aspire Role Models Program

DESCRIPTION

The LMA Aspire Role Models inspires young Muslim Australians and challenges stereotypes and misconceptions of the Muslim community through an interactive presentation of their life path to achievement and success in their chosen field. This has been an ongoing LMA initiative for over 12 months, with strong relationships developed with local schools and community leaders.

STRENGTHS

This will improve the levels of self-esteem and aspiration of Muslim students, and change the attitude towards citizenship and social inclusion. It has also worked towards developing positive perceptions of Muslims and Islamic contributions to the betterment of Australian society.

CHALLENGES

Developing long lasting relationships with local schools, both private and public, has proven to be a challenge, as well as coordinating times between the facilitators and speakers, and the schools themselves.

4.5. Bullying, Peer Pressure, & Online Issues

Four (4) key initiatives were devised in the focus group discussion, as seen below. Participants sought to devise initiatives for prevention as well as intervention. The initiatives were also designed with a view to empowering both young people and groups and organisations within the community.



1

Holistic Multifaceted Bullying Campaign

DESCRIPTION

This initiative would involve the dissemination of information pertaining to bullying; including cyber bullying; for young people, parents, families and relevant people of authority in the community on brochures, posters and via social media campaigns. It would also involve online surveys to accompany the social media campaign in order to gather research to inform future initiatives. A significant aspect of the program is the provision of a code of conduct with reference to appropriate *adab* for negotiating conflict in person conflict, online and social media spaces for young people in the community and within their TOR.

STRENGTH

Applies a strength based approach, operates within the communities TOR (addresses *Zulum*), deals with underlying issues, identifies issues for increased awareness and increased reporting, responds to the vulnerable; will gather research that is nascent in the Muslim community as to the social determinants or root causes of bullying.

CHALLENGES

Requires quality control, requires funding, must transcend cultural and language barriers.

2

Social Experiment

DESCRIPTION

This would involve a virtual campaign within the community's TOR involving dramatic scenarios acted out by identifiable community members and then resolved or prevented. The scenarios would aim to educate the community on what constitutes bullying and increase awareness of the underlying issues pertaining to bullying. The initiative would also develop personal skills for increased and enhanced bystander intervention.

STRENGTH

Vehicle for gathering research (surveys, qualitative interview, peer pressure theory), engaging medium and a point of difference to other campaigns, real life and situational, will educate on new laws regarding cyber bullying; an active bystander approach, involve community ambassadors recognisable by the community.

CHALLENGES

The content must be authentic; quality controlled; costs must be considered; requires key ambassadors of the initiative as well as recognisable people in the simulated scenarios; requires an evidenced based to mediate the scenarios and the educational messages provided.

3

Community Mediation Initiative

DESCRIPTION

This initiative would involve the development of an interagency "Memorandum of Understanding" for those serving and working within and for the community. This initiative was discussed as expanding to include an "Adaab of Intra-Community Partner Engagement Policy"; the development of an agreed intervention and mediation strategy for addressing issues between community partners or stakeholders; and a healing and mediation process by an external mediator to address historical conflict between community partners and stakeholders.

STRENGTH

Raise the self-esteem of the community; prevent community conflict which impacts negatively on young people; develops tools to prevent conflict and maintain functional and productive relationships guided by TOR.

CHALLENGES

Reaching a consensus for an accepted external mediator may be challenging; needs to engage and secure commitment for the majority – accept that some will not engage; it has enforceability; sustainability of intervention procedures; substantial historical and unaddressed issues between partners and stakeholders within the community.

4

Enhanced Forum Theatre Initiative

DESCRIPTION

This initiative would involve tailoring the Cooling Conflict Program to the needs of the local community and within their TOR. Cooling Conflict in the focus group was conceived of as having application as a preventative and intervention initiative. The program explores the underlying causes of bullying, including online bullying while assisting participants to develop personal skills to deescalate conflict that leads to bullying (O'Toole, Burton, and Plunket, 2005). It utilises a form of drama known as enhanced forum theatre which actively involves the audience in solving scenarios within the safe medium of drama (O'Toole, Burton, and Plunket, 2005). The program could be initiated in local Islamic and State Schools and well as more broadly in community theatre spaces.

STRENGTH

The Cooling Conflict Program was thought to have been trialled successfully across schools all over the country, including an Islamic school in Brisbane; the initiative is evidence based; the initiative is already packaged, cost and planning could likely be easily tailored to the local context; it has been proven to increase reporting of incidence of bullying; it responds to the underlying issues that lead to bullying such as the abuse of power; it is cost effective for schools; possible to attract funding for community theatre.

CHALLENGES

Availability of spaces for community theatre; lack of community support or appreciation for the Arts; a need for key creative stakeholders to ensure it works.

“

The scenarios would aim to educate the community on what constitutes bullying and increase awareness of the underlying issues pertaining to bullying. The initiative would also develop personal skills for increased and enhanced bystander intervention.



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To transmit information about mental health to young Muslims, participants described how visual aids such as videos, poems, advertisements can be used as tools to communicate emotional well-being...

4.6. Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being

In addressing mental health and emotional well-being two specific categories of initiatives were generated: the transmission of knowledge about mental health to young Muslims and the need for an evidence-base to inform strategies that address mental health in Muslim communities.

4.6.1. KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION

Initiatives were generated to address the need to transmit knowledge about mental health and emotional well-being to youth aged 13-25 years old. These initiatives are grounded in the Islamic worldview and strength-based approach (see Section 1.3). Three main initiatives were identified to address the transmission of knowledge including social media, speakers and programs.

1 Social Media



VISUAL AIDS

DESCRIPTION

To transmit information about mental health to young Muslims, participants described how visual aids such as videos, poems, advertisements can be used as tools to communicate emotional well-being for improved mental health.

STRENGTHS

It is visual, can be repeated/recalled, distinguishable, easy to access, effective, utilises culturally/religiously appropriate background noise and known people (e.g. Kamal Saleh, Nouman Ali Khan) who relate to youth.

CHALLENGES

Reaching those without internet access, length (has to be < 3mins), quality, and relatedness - issues be youth-specific.

CATCH PHRASES

DESCRIPTION

These are audio or written catch phrases that deliver bite-sized information about mental health issues which are easy to remember.

STRENGTHS

Short, sharp, succinct, jingle, memorisable and effective

CHALLENGES

Avoid offense, structure, includes religiously/culturally permissible material, comprehension and length (can't be too long).

2 Speakers



ROLE MODELS

DESCRIPTION

Includes shuyukh (Muslim scholars) that young Muslims can relate to (e.g. Kamal Saleh, Nouman Ali Khan, etc.), football players and role models within the community that speak about address mental health issues that given their established rapport with youth.

STRENGTHS

Appeal to youth, prior connectedness because of shared interest with role-model, knowledge about worldview, good character influence, credibility

CHALLENGES

Availability, appropriateness (shared worldview), what they may say (may need prior script), who you invite (particularly if inviting more than one speaker at the same time – no apparent conflict).

PROFESSIONALS

DESCRIPTION

Professionals who are well-versed on mental health issues could deliver youth-specific presentations that address particular mental health issue.

STRENGTHS

Knowledgeable, have experience, empathetic, and credible.

CHALLENGES

Language/terminology may become barrier – has to be grounded in worldview to make it meaningful, authority (some youth may rebel against them because they represent authority) and cultural sensitivity issues (professionals must have adequate cultural sensitivity training to be able to address Muslim youth).



SURVIVORS' STORIES

DESCRIPTION

Survivors of mental health issues such as depression, self-harm and obsessive compulsive disorders can share their stories with youth to demystify the mental health issues and remove the shame associated with discussing mental health illnesses.

STRENGTHS

Lived experience, similar journey to young survivor, empowerment, highly relatable, provides hope, and are empathetic.

CHALLENGES

Privacy/confidentiality issues – some survivors may not want to talk about their experiences of mental health issues, safety of space (survivors may feel threatened or unsafe to tell their stories for fear of shame and being ostracised), variation in situational solutions (survivor's solutions to a mental health issue may not be relevant to young Muslim being addressed).



3 Programs



DESCRIPTION

These may include seminars, workshops, active role-play sessions and activities with professionals on specific mental health issues with the focus on acquiring positive coping skills to prevent them.

STRENGTHS

Action oriented, knowledge gained is transferrable, shared, practical, reach out to large audiences.

CHALLENGES

Lack of interest of youth (thus require incentives to encourage attendance), varied effectiveness among individuals, attention span (sessions have to take this into account), engaging participants (activities have to be designed to engage), delivery of the program (choosing appropriate individuals to reach out to the youth is important).



4.6.2. LACK OF EVIDENCE-BASE

Research is required to address the lack of an evidence-base about mental health in the Muslim community. The group discussion identified three main areas where research is required including prevalence of the different forms of mental health issues amongst young Muslims (and larger community) within the Muslim community; what do young Muslims know about mental health and where to go to access services for mental health (to identify what organisations youth are aware of). Two main tools were identified in the group discussions to address the lack of evidence-base including the use of surveys and small focus groups:

1 Surveys



DESCRIPTION

Surveys should ideally be designed by psychologists/researchers to incorporate the Islamic worldview and appropriate terminology into the instruments. This is of particular importance given how Islam views human nature and faith-based practices in addressing emotional well-being such as stress, anxiety, depression, self-harm, among others. Often youth shy away from discussing mental health issues due to the sensitive nature of topics and the shame associated with disclosing certain mental illnesses. Gathering this information from youths without them disclosing their identity would facilitate evidence-based approaches.

STRENGTHS

Hard true facts, evidence, culturally sensitive, anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation, gather data from diverse/large groups simultaneously, easy to administer, online to provide privacy, may have incentives to encourage participation.

CHALLENGES

Socially desirable responses (include items to counteract for this), incomplete surveys (design of instrument would be important here), lack of interest (provide incentives to encourage participation), length (short surveys more likely to be completed).

Small Focus Groups



2

DESCRIPTION

Small focus groups were viewed as necessary to delve deeper into mental health issues that young Muslims were facing. These small focus groups create a safe-space for the youth where they can discuss mental health issues without being judged or labelled.

STRENGTHS

Intimate discussions, opinions are heard and group members would share similar interests and knowledge.

CHALLENGES

Issues dealing with privacy (a safe space would need to be guaranteed where issues being discussed would be kept confidential and no judgements made about the individuals), lack of interest (strategies designed to generate interest), and availability of young Muslims to participate in group discussions (provide an incentive that would encourage participation).

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These small focus groups create a safe-space for the youth where they can discuss mental health issues without being judged or labelled.



05 Feedback & Evaluation

The overall feedback for the Forward Thinking Forum has been quite positive, with participants scoring the two day event a mean score of 8/10, with 10 being excellent and 1 being very poor.

This indicated the attendees generally had a very positive experience with the forum, and a large majority indicated they would return if the project was ever run again.

Some expressed great sentiments around the diversity of opinions and at the opportunity to speak on issues that were relatable to their experiences. They were also quite happy with the number of people who had also taken part, citing a fear at being drowned out if more people had attended. They also showed great understanding and approval of the systems that the facilitators employed in the two days, enjoying the structure and the variety it brought to discussions.

Most participants did give some feedback in regards to the timing, stating that there was not enough time to delve into the topics suggested by the attendees in greater depth. Most would have liked to have seen more time allocated and more opportunities to continue the discussion around each topic. Furthermore, a majority expressed a hope that some of the recommendations actually form a part of the LMA's strategy moving forward, and that the suggesting actuate into something practical.



06 Conclusion

To generate effective initiatives for young Muslims in South-West Sydney, a strength-based approach operating within the community's terms of reference was a prerequisite.

This approach served to ground participants both within their social context and Islamic worldview. The Yarning Circle and de Bono's Thinking Hats were two instruments used to unpack the six key themes in the facilitated focus group discussions (see Tables 2 & 3). The focus groups proved effective in generating community capacity building initiatives as illustrated in Sections 3 and 4. The strengths and challenges for each initiative were identified, adding rigour to the critical thinking process in formulating them and critically informing future implementation planning.

The Yarning Circle proved effective and translatable once adapted and infused with an Islamic worldview for the Muslim community. However, in future research it is recommended that the Yarning Circle be used as an orientating tool toward participants' TOR and de Bono's hats used solely for data collection.

The Yarning Circle freed participants of a common pre-conceived reactionary and negative outlook on community challenges and issues. It also reconfigured the language used and critically embedded all discussions henceforth within TOR. De Bono's Thinking Hats also proved very effective. It initiated critical thinking that resulted in informed initiatives and incorporated sequential reflective techniques which served to refine each suggested initiative. It was creatively adapted to infuse the SBA and TOR in the focus groups throughout the process.

The real strength of the report and the Forward Thinking Forum Project will be its social impact on the community. It is imperative that LMA seek to implement identified initiatives. It is more critical that the young people see that their voice can play an active part in the social change and community capacity building initiatives in the community. Ownership of these initiatives and their implementation will be conducive to effective implementation. Involvement of the process will also likely be as empowering as the outcomes. Young people require parameters, processes and frameworks for knowing, doing and being; or in other words TOR for operating within their worldview. Without this the danger is that the young people can in fact be disempowered and regress into a deficit approach that constrains individual and community capacity.

07 Recommendations

A number of recommendations emerged from the Forward Thinking Forum Project outlined in this report. The key recommendation being that LMA identify what initiatives fall within their charter and take meaningful steps to implement them.

Further, that LMA assume leadership in sharing initiatives that either best belong under the charter of other community stakeholders or play a mediating role in establishing inter-agency collaboration to implement holistic initiatives via a whole community approach. Dealing with historical barriers to expunge old ways of thinking that are debilitating the way forward is also necessary; something LMA may choose to lead or potentially lobby for an external mediator.

Another important role LMA can play is in enhancing the engagement of Imams with young people and in their involvement in community initiatives; a reoccurring point across all focus group discussions. Participants viewed the Imams as crucial to facilitating young people working within their TOR despite the fact that they felt the Imams needed to be more open minded and responsive to the social context. Some participants also identified the Imams as important connecting pieces to bridging both the generation gap and the confusion between cultural dogma and religious principles.

A further recommendation involves operating from an evidence-based platform to add rigour to initiatives generated. This research is required to inform evidence-based practices. LMA would be advised to approach experts in the field to benchmark the initiatives generated by participants and ensure they are



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LMA must also be acknowledged for the considerable community capacity building endeavours they have been engaged in that led to the success of this project.

implemented commensurate with best practice. These initiatives then need to be piloted with smaller groups before large-scale implementation.

LMA must be commended for leading the Forward Thinking Forum Project. LMA must also be acknowledged for the considerable community capacity building endeavours they have been engaged in that led to the success of this project. Principally, the role played in engaging with the young people who were the participants of the focus groups. The context that young Muslims find themselves in within South Western Sydney and across Australian is indeed complex and evolving. Further projects like this and most importantly implementation of the identified initiatives are needed.

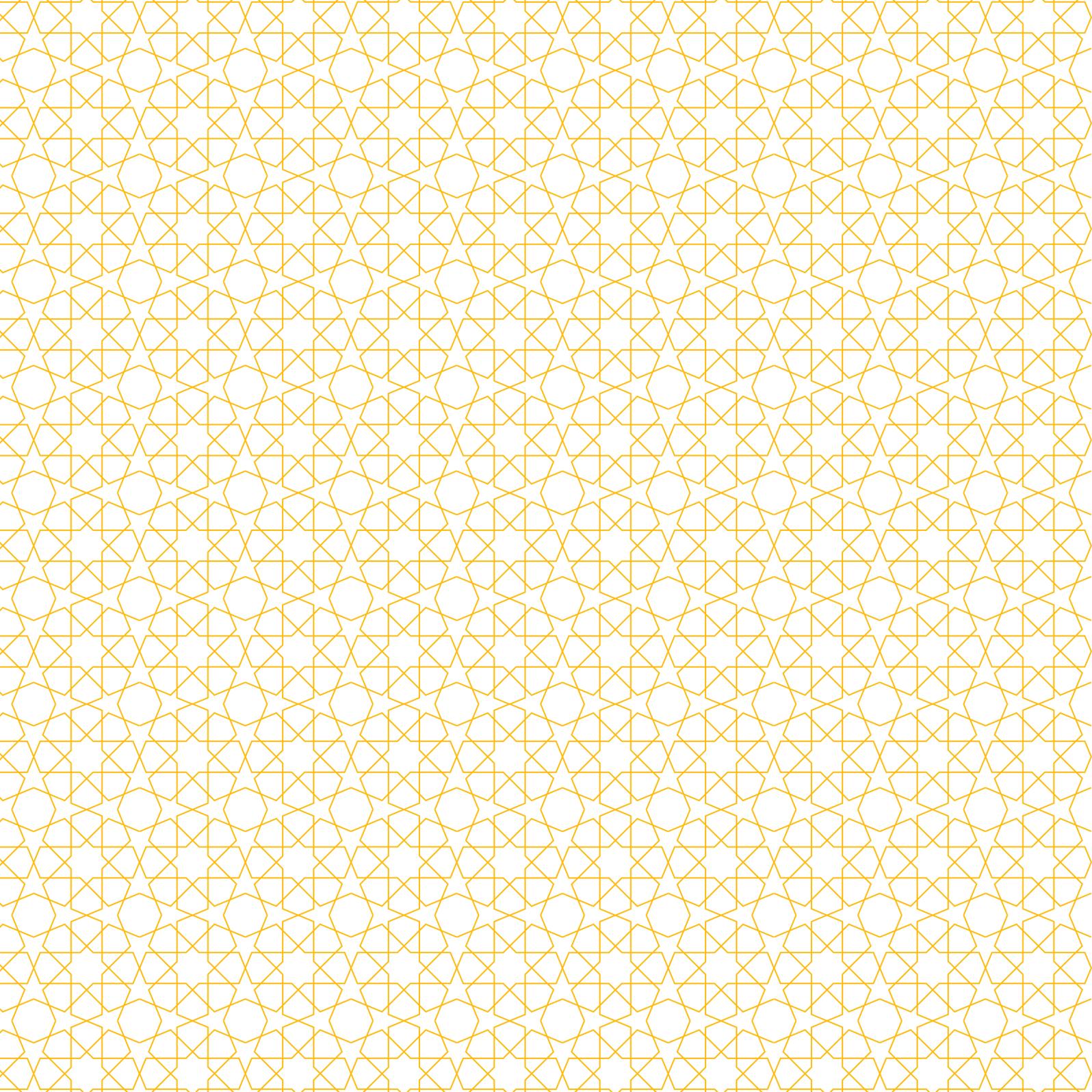


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Our Community, Our Future

