

Grassroots roots

FINAL ACTIVITY REPORT:

GRASSROOTS YOUTH SERVICES LAUNCH

FEDERATION SQUARE, 30TH APRIL 2006



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Summary

The Grassroots Muslim Youth Services Launch brought together a diverse range of Muslim youth from a variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds to participate in a broad-based community youth festival. The event was also attended by non-Muslim youth, social justice organizations (both Muslim and non-Muslim) and employment providers. Entertainment and presentations ranged from demonstrations on the history of breakdancing to talks on issues such as mental health and depression.

The event was the first of its kind; in excess of four hundred young people attended the launch and provided overwhelmingly positive feedback. For many, it was their first contact with the Islamic Council of Victoria. Stallholders and community organizations also registered positive feedback and were extremely happy with the response they received from young people on the day.

Feedback collected at the launch has indicated that Grassroots has touched on key areas of concern for young Muslims who are eager to see the program continue and expand in areas such as social justice, mental health, recreation, employment, interfaith dialogue, and advocacy.



Attendance



The Grassroots launch was successfully publicised and attracted a wide range of youth from various educational, social and cultural sectors. Specifically, the launch was publicised at housing commission flats, Islamic and non-Islamic schools, universities, and youth centres. The event was also publicised via a Grassroots website, emails, as well as hard copy mailouts to local councils.

The event clearly attracted a diverse cross-section of youth who would normally not attend Muslim community events or mosques. Many young people attending also brought non-Muslim friends, and expressed that they did not usually feel comfortable bringing their friends to Muslim events.



Schools:

Minaret College

King Khaled Islamic College

East Preston Islamic College

Ilim College

MacRobertson Girls High

Melbourne Girls College

Noble Park Sec. College

Springvale Sec. College

Maribyrnong Sec. College

Broadmedows Sec. College

Pascoe Vale Sec. College

Gilmore College for Girls

Brunswick Sec. College

Wellington Sec. College

University High School

Collingwood College

Roxburgh College

Mill Park Sec. College

Footscray College

Reservoir Sec College

Glen Waverley Sec. College

Strathmore Sec. College

MacRobertson Girls College

Muslim clients and networks through:

Knox City council

Hobson's Bay City Council

City of Yarra council

City of Moreland council

City of Darebin council

City of Greater Dandenong council

Migrant Information Centre Eastern Region

Young Muslims of Australia

Collingwood Public housing estate

Fitzroy public housing estate

Carlton public housing estate

Collingwood public housing estate

Adult Multicultural Education Centre

Collingwood youth services

Inner Health Community Centre

Fitzroy Legal Service

Sudanese Australian English Learning Program

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

Fitzroy Learning Network

Islamic Council of Victoria

Islamic Girls Womens' Group

Australian multicultural foundation

Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues

Horn of Africa Community Network

Victorian University of Technology

Latrobe University

Monash University

University of Melbourne

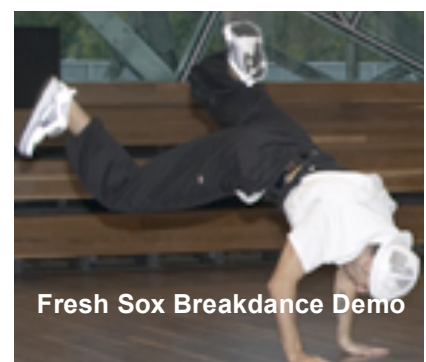
Young Australian Muslim of the Year Program

Young Muslims of Australia



The Grassroots launch operated in an open space format where young people could choose to browse stalls, attend workshops or watch speakers and performers on the main stage. Entertainment included comedy and hip-hop performances by Muslim and non-Muslim performers. Hip-hop performances by members of Zulu Nation focused on the cultural significance and history of hip-hop culture, including ways in which hip-hop has been used as a means of curbing gang violence. Presentations involved a segment on youth mental health issues by psychologist Monique Toohey (co-ordinator, Young Australian Muslim of the Year) and talks on media engagement by writer Waleed Aly (The Age).

Both the presentations and entertainment proved to be extremely popular with the youth. Many commented that it was the first time such content had been provided at a mainstream Muslim event, and were excited that such an event was endorsed and organised by a mainstream organization such as the Islamic Council of Victoria.



Workshops



The Grassroots launch aimed to give young people a sense of agency and empowerment incorporating hands-on involvement and practical education. A range of hip-hop workshops allowed young Muslims to learn how to rap, breakdance, beatbox and Dj in a culturally sensitive environment. The workshops were all extremely popular, demonstrating an obvious demand amongst young people for such activities.

The most popular workshops were clearly the girls-only dance and rap workshops, which were consistently filled beyond capacity. Young people expressed that they wanted ongoing classes of the same style, and that events such as the Grassroots launch had to happen annually, if not more often.

Many youth events recreate a school environment by forcing young people to passively watch a set program of speakers and presentations. The launch successfully maintained an energetic and engaging atmosphere by allowing young people to exercise choices about their day rather than being forced to adhere to a strict program. Many young people attended all the workshops and even did the same workshop a number of times to build their skills.



Stallholders



The community partners present on the day were: Reconciliation Victoria, Nasihah Counselling, Youthlaw, Red Cross, Australian Volunteers International, Zulu Nation, Young Muslims of Australia, Women For Palestine, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. All stallholders registered extremely good feedback and reported a high level of interest from young people. Specifically:

- **Nasihah Counselling** reported that many young people were particularly interested in mental health, and expressed concerns over a lack of culturally appropriate counselling and support services available to young Muslims
- **CMYI** reported a high level of interest, signing up in excess of 80 young people to various programs. Specifically, there was considerable interest expressed in CMYI's programs with four people completing application forms (three mentees and one mentor) to participate in their new Multicultural Youth Mentoring Project. Twelve people completed forms to be placed on CMYI's Youth Participation Register, which offers the chance for young people to get involved in a diverse range of projects for the purpose of skill and professional development, networking and building friendships. There was also interest expressed in their Young Leaders of Today program, Youth Reference Committee and the activities of CMYI's Program Team.
- **Young Muslims of Australia** registered over 60 new young people for youth camps
- The Grassroots TTC Dialogue course and Media Mentoring programs registered in excess of 50 expressions of interest each
- **Youthlaw** was approached by many young people keen to understand their basic legal; many were interested in education around issues of police harassment, particularly youth from areas such as Flemington and Kensington where relations between police and Muslim youth are particularly hostile.

- **Zulu Nation** was approached by many young people keen to continue hip-hop related activities. Zulu Nation has also expressed an interest in ongoing social justice projects and partnerships with Grassroots.
- **Reconciliation Victoria** spoke to many young Muslims keen to develop ties between the Muslim community and Indigenous Australians, in particular Indigenous youth.
- **The Australian Bureau of Statistics** advertised employment for the 2006 Census and reported a high level of interest; young people were particularly excited about job opportunities that celebrated diversity and recognised a second language as a skill and asset.
- **Women for Palestine** sent the following email after the event:

WOMEN FOR PALESTINE

MELBOURNE - AUSTRALIA

14 May 2006

Ms Raiyan Abdul Rahim
 Projects Officer
 'Grassroots' – Islamic Council
 of Victoria Youth Wing
 Level 4, Ross House
 247 Flinders Lane.
 MELBOURNE 3000

Dear Raiyan,

Thank you so much inviting us to participate in the 'Grassroots' Youth Festival on Sunday 30 April 2006. It was great to have an opportunity to speak with young people from so many different backgrounds. We were amazed by the enthusiasm and interest shown by them in the work we do. In particular, our olive tree campaign received a lot of support.

The atmosphere at the Festival was really positive and all-embracing with plenty of activities, entertainment and information for everyone. In fact, with the weather so miserable outside, we were very glad to be under the roof of BMW Edge because it made everything and everyone very accessible.

It was pleasing to see so many non-Muslim youth there as well, mingling and talking and enjoying the entertainment. As observers, we could see that such festivals are a valuable way of presenting different cultures and beliefs to the Australian community. We have no doubt that continuing them will help to break down the negative stereotyping that has unfortunately become so prevalent in our society.

We really commend 'Grassroots' for running such a well-organised and friendly festival and cannot speak more highly of those involved: there was always someone there to help and to make sure we had everything we needed. The effort put in was much appreciated and we hope there will be many more opportunities to participate in future events.

Thank you for a most enjoyable day.

Sonja Karkar
 President

Volunteers

A core of 40 volunteers helped to organise the Grassroots launch. In addition to these, an additional 115 young people registered their interest as volunteers for future projects.

Feedback

The average feedback on forms returned by participants was 9/10. The comedy and hip-hop content of the program was extremely popular, with many young people asking that Grassroots conduct an annual event similar to the launch. Many young people had thought that such an event would never be endorsed by a significant Muslim organization and were extremely pleased that the Islamic Council of Victoria had backed the event.

In particular, young people enjoyed:

- The opportunity to meet other young Muslims in a culturally appropriate yet relaxed setting
- Hip-Hop and comedy in a culturally appropriate environment

Primary areas of concern or interest expressed on feedback forms were:

- Womens' sports activities
- Building bridges with the Indigenous Australian community
- Media training
- Employment
- Mental health services
- Social justice and volunteering opportunities
- Ongoing social events of similar scale and content to the Grassroots launch
- Interfaith social justice projects
- Access to justice, in particular education about legal rights and responses to police harassment

Key Objectives

Thus far the Grassroots project has succeeded in addressing all of the project's key objectives, which are:

1. To address the main areas of concern for Muslim youth: alienation, discrimination, unemployment and powerlessness that leads to antisocial behaviour ranging from petty crime and depression through to more extreme manifestations, such as terrorism.
2. To combat anti-social behaviour in Muslim youth through youth-friendly social awareness, education, anti-racism and arts-focused activities which aims to foster senses of inclusiveness, social responsibility, and empowerment.
3. To provide an interesting, enriching and entertaining Islamic alternative to the limited Muslim youth options available in Victoria at present.
4. To create an accessible, youth-friendly space to cater to a diverse range of Muslim Youth that will be a base from which to run all ICV youth programs.
5. To raise ICV's profile amongst youth and the wider community specifically by making it relevant to the growth and empowerment of young people.

Overall, the launch has succeeded in:

- a) Providing opportunities for young Muslims to engage with the wider community and develop social awareness and an identity as part of Australian society;
- b) Providing opportunities for young Muslims to interact with other young Muslims and non-Muslims in a religiously appropriate, safe and welcoming environment;
- c) Providing opportunities for young Muslims to learn about Islam in an Australian context and develop an Australian Muslim identity;
- d) Increasing awareness among young Muslims of volunteering opportunities in both the Muslim community and the broader community;
- e) Encouraging young Muslims as active, aware, engaged, responsible, creative and proactive participants in the Muslim community and Australian society;
- f) Providing services and referrals for young Muslims in areas such as employment, access to justice, and counselling;
- g) Raising the public profile of the Islamic Council of Victoria.

Community Response



The community response towards the Grassroots launch and the project in general has been extremely positive. A large concern from the outset of the project was the potential for a conservative backlash. When compared to the support for the project, such complaints have been practically negligible.

Many delegates at the Victorian Muslim Youth Summit and community leaders have also expressed their support for the project. The following is an extract from an email sent to Grassroots organisers by a member of the Islamic Council of Victoria Executive Committee:

I know I already said this on the phone, but I wanted to say it in writing. Yesterday was one of the most successful things that the ICV has ever done. I had a great time.

Admittedly, I had some trepidation, but when I looked out at the crowd I saw that we were reaching out to some kids who may never go to a mosque. We were giving all of them a sense of confidence in their identity as Australian Muslims. And, after the second act on the history of hip-hop, I can now understand why hip-hop is such a great medium to do that.

(...)

Please keep moving ahead.

Grassroots has also received extremely positive feedback from youth and community workers who deal with Muslim clients, in particular those who work with youth from Horn of Africa communities. There has also been an enthusiastic response from the community development sector; many community and youth services were actively promoting the launch before even being formally contacted by Grassroots. School welfare co-ordinators and counsellors from both Islamic and non-Islamic schools have also said that a youth service like Grassroots is crucial for addressing issues faced by many of the youth they deal with.

Future Directions

It is clear that the Grassroots launch has effectively highlighted and begun to address key areas of concern for young Muslims. The successes of the launch and consequent community feedback have outlined numerous potential projects around areas of advocacy, mental health, recreation, social justice, employment and community capacity building. Naturally, the ability to run such programs will depend greatly on human resources and funding.

Potential future activities include theatre and film projects, social justice and media conferences, counselling services, media training and community legal education campaigns. The success of these programs requires capitalising on the momentum of the launch in order to attract similar youth to participate in more specific, focused projects.



Acknowledgements

Grassroots would like to thank the Islamic Council of Victoria Executive Committee, administrative staff and CEO Rowan Gould for their support, Mr Hass Delal, Ms Lynn Cain and staff at the Australian Multicultural Foundation for their extensive assistance, as well as all the performers and community organizations who participated in the Grassroots launch. We would also like to thank the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs for their generous support. Finally, Grassroots would like to thank Alexia Higgs, Federation Square and BMW Edge staff for their professionalism and support throughout the project and on the day of the launch.

