

CALD Fathering

Migrant Resource Centre North West Region



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Mueen Albreihi

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Project Overview

The Iraq born community in the City of Hume is a relatively large community. It comprises a combination of community groups from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds: Arab, Torkomans (Iraqis of Turkish Origin), Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Kurds.

At the time of 1996 Census of Population and Housing, there was a recorded 14,005 Iraq born people living in Australia. By the 2001 Census, this population had dramatically increased to 24,832.

Within the City of Hume 1.7 % of the population were estimated be Iraqi born, making it the 4th largest population (outside Australian born) to reside in the local government area. Although there has been an established Iraqi community living in the Hume area for more than ten years, increasing numbers of new arrivals from Iraqi background have moved to suburbs such as Broadmeadows, Coolaroo, Dallas and Roxburgh Park in the last few years.

The Migrant Resource Centre North West Region (MRCNW) chose to undertake the "CALD Fathering Project" with this community for a number of reasons. In particular, while the Iraq born community is one of the largest newly arrived communities in the local area, there are few successful programmes that have targeted fathers to address parenting as an issue within this community.

The project was funded under the Communities for Children initiative with the aim of conducting a series of focus groups with men with children under 6 years to establish what they seek and how they wish to receive parenting support. The results of the focus group will then be used to develop a model for working with fathers around parenting in consultation with fathers.



The broad aims of the project are to:

- increase communication among fathers and their young children from CALD backgrounds
- increase fathers' confidence and self esteem in relation to parenting skills
- improve links between services and fathers & community groups
- increase fathers' knowledge about diverse fathering issues within the Australian society.

The project was broken into two major parts. The first part involves research with the community on their needs and how they would like to receive support. The second part of the project will involve piloting a model for supporting fathers. This report presents the results of the research.

The project' worker will meet with partners agencies and service providers in the near future to discuss the findings to the research. This meeting will include some of the participants from the focus groups. The outcomes of the proposed meeting will be crucial for the future development of an action plan for a possible implementation of the next stage of the project.



Methodology

The project started by preparing materials for publicity. Letters with information about the project in both Arabic and English languages were developed and sent to several community groups and key community leaders via email. Contact was also made with several community organizations and through the worker's networks. This initial contact was followed by phone calls and face to face meetings with the potential participants or sources of participants to explain the project in more detail.

From this initial contact a number of fathers from different Iraqi community groups (Arab, Torkomans, Assyrians, Chaldeans and Kurds) expressed an interest in participating in the project. This resulted in eighteen interviews with fathers in focus groups, and where participation in focus groups was not possible, on an individual basis.

❖ Focus groups

Two focus groups were formed and ran in June and July 2006. Thirteen fathers participated in the groups and were reimbursed \$25 each for their time and travel expenses. The focus groups were conducted in Arabic. A tape recorder was used to record the discussion, which was facilitated by the project worker sometimes with the assistance of another member of MRC staff (also from Iraqi background). The discussion was later transcribed and summaries of the discussions were translated from Arabic into English.

❖ Individual interviews

A further five fathers were interviewed on individual basis (four fathers in two groups; two in each interview, and one more father was interviewed alone). These interviews were carried out in a similar way to those of focus groups in relation to the aims, the way they were conducted and the questions the



participants were asked. These interviews were conducted in this way because the participants were unable to join the larger focus group discussion. These interviews did provide an opportunity to listen to some fathers in a relatively private environment and enabled some detail that it was not possible to go into within the focus group discussion to be sought.

❖ A combination of participants

The 18 participants were a combination of fathers in relation to their ethnicity, ages, number and ages of children they have and year of arrival to Australia.

Seven participants identified as Arab Muslims. Four participants identified as Turkoman Muslims. One participant identified as Kurdish Muslim. Two participants identified as Assyrians and a further four identified as Chaldeans.

The ages of the participants ranged from between 25 and 55. More than half of participants had children from both within the target range and older. The remainder had children only under the 6-year target range.

Three of the participants had been in Australia for less than a year. A further four had been in Australia for more than 6 years. The remainder of participants had been in Australia for an average of about 5 years. The total number of children aged 6 fathered by the eighteen participants was 25 children.

A summary of the participants is provided in Appendix A.

❖ Consultations

Consultations were held with three community workers from two organizations. The workers that were interviewed had either an extensive history of working with the Iraqi community or have done research in the area of parenting. The aim of these



consultations was firstly to gain some overall knowledge about the Iraqi community and the community groups, and secondly to know what has been done and what the outcomes were.

❖ Questions

The participants were asked questions which aimed to identify their experiences of fathering in Australia, their needs in terms of what information they would like to have access to and finally they were asked to identify the best ways of disseminating this information for their community.

A copy of the questions asked is attached in Appendix B.



Findings

❖ Experience of parenting

There were a number of broad issues that were able to be identified from the participants in relation to influence over their fathering skills. These included:

- *Cultural issues in relation to conflict between their own (Iraqi) and their new cultural environment.*

Almost all participants regarded culture as the main factor that affects their abilities to practice normal fathering activities. These factors include language, religious faiths and other relevant cultural issues. Most of the participants identified trying to maintain balance between Iraqi culture and the new (Australian) culture as a major issue and regarded maintaining this balance as one of the biggest challenges. Some of the participants identified that their exposure to fathering in Iraq may have influenced their ideas of fathering. Physical punishment of children back in their communities was identified as one of the issues concerning many fathers.

Several indicated that their exposure to parenting including their treatment by their parents and what they had witnessed or practiced as parents living in a community that support this way of parenting was difficult to reconcile with their understanding of parenting in Australia. Some of the participants indicated that the challenge for them was sorting out the good and bad aspects of both cultures and learning to practice aspects of the new culture.

- *Lack of general knowledge about fathering in Australia*

When asked about their knowledge in the area of fathering in Australia, fathers replied they have little or no information in this regard. This included Australian laws and regulations in relation to the rights of children and parents, family laws etc.



- *Lack of knowledge of services*

Participants also indicated that they had no or very basic information about the local services that they may be able to access in order to assist with their fathering activities.

- *Inability to classify different parenting issues.*

Most of fathers showed an inability to classify issues that may be of concern to them in relation to their fathering activities in a way that would enable them to access and approach a service provider that could assist with that difficulty.

- *Financial difficulties.*

Some fathers raised their household financial situation as another factor that affects their ability to actively parent their children. Due to financial difficulties, some fathers indicated that they have to work long and /or casual hours that makes it difficult to organize their time in a way that gives them the opportunity to communicate with their children.



❖ Needs

As identified earlier, most of fathers interviewed admitted that they have no or little knowledge in the area of fathering in Australia. They also indicated that they lack information about service providers who deal with issues of fathering.

In terms of addressing this need, the participants identified the following information as useful:

- General information about fathering /parenting
- Information about specific aspects of fathering/ parenting
- Legal information about children and their rights as well as information about the rights and responsibilities of parents in Australia
- Information about opportunities for recreational activities and /or social gatherings which provide a setting for fathers to engage with their children
- Information about organizations and agencies provide assistance in fathering / parenting and about issues facing young children as well as information about how to access these services



❖ Views and Ideas

Most of participants recommended the following ideas as the most preferred methods to help them get support with their fathering activities:

- Holding information sessions at the MRCNW or any other appropriate venue to provide fathers with information about fathering (in appropriate language).
- Providing (by mail or otherwise) fathers with flyers or booklets (in appropriate first language) with information about any parenting issues.
- Providing fathers with flyers, booklets etc, with legal information related to children's rights and parents' rights and responsibilities.
- Holding information sessions about child legal issues to be run by professionals.
- Providing fathers with information (preferably in relevant first language) about parenting services in the region and help them have access to these service when required.
- Fathers are interested in recreational excursions along with their children.
- Younger fathers are interested in attending informal social sessions to learn from more experienced fathers
- Visits by professionals to families to look closely to their needs in the area of parenting.
- Training or sessions, similar to what they usually receive about vaccination or dental services!
- Supporting fathers to create an umbrella group for Iraqi fathers or families regardless of their ethnic backgrounds.



Discussion

There were several issues that were raised in the focus groups discussions which seem to resonate across the participants. These seemed to particularly relate to access of information, the challenges of adjusting to a new culture, and other social orientation issues.

Evident throughout the discussions was the perceived lack of information in the relevant languages about parenting and fathering in particular. While ideas for information sessions and audio visual presentations of information were prevalent throughout the discussions, the need for written materials to support the other forms of information seemed to be very significant. Certainly the discussions indicated that the fathers did not feel that this information was readily accessible to them.

Also significant in the discussions were issues around the challenges of adjusting to a new culture and being able to sort through the information from the old and new cultures that should be discarded or held on to. This challenge is common across many new arrival groups and tends to lessen as the exposure to the new culture increases. This varies between ethnic groups within the community itself as a result of religious, traditional and other cultural beliefs. In the MRC's experience, attitudes around social orientation and settlement can be influenced to some degree through the more established components of the community and through community leaders.

This issue was supported through the consultations that were held with the three community workers especially in the area of how to disseminate the information. The workers, who had extensive experience in working with the Iraq born community, did also identify that having information provided by (or associated with) members of the community that are well respected and well known was an important factor.

The role of men within the household and within a new community was raised to a lesser extent as influencing the parenting skill of the participating fathers. Several indicated that they felt finances were a constraint to spending time with their children as they were forced to work difficult and unpredictable hours. Similarly



several fathers indicated that the opportunities to spend time with their children engaging in positive activities were not readily available to them.

The discussion with the focus groups and participants have led to the formulation of a number of recommendations.



Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed from the information provided by the participants:

1. Information to be collected / developed in Arabic and other relevant languages on parenting (targeting male audience) and made available for dissemination to the community (including audio / visual information).
2. Recreation based activities to be undertaken with fathers and children with a component of activities based around parenting issues /discussions /support.
3. Information sessions on parenting to be undertaken with relevant community representatives with expertise in parenting / fathering issues. These sessions may also address legal issues related children and discipline.
4. Development of a support group for parents.
5. Social based activities with fathers from Iraqi background with parenting / fathering as a small component. This might be undertaken by forming a group that meets regularly, every fortnight or once a month or so on.
6. Opportunities for recreation based activities appropriate for fathers and their children be collected and disseminated throughout the community.



Appendix A

A summary of the participants:

No.	Name	Year of arrival	Age	Total No. of Chid.)	No. of Chid. (0-6)
1	Arabic Muslim	2002	36	3	3
2	Arabic Muslim	2001	35	3	2
3	Arabic Muslim	2001	31	1	1
4	Arabic Muslim	2001	25	1	1
5	Arabic Muslim	2001	42	6	1
6	Kurdish Muslim	1999	39	3	1
7	Chaldean	2005	43	4	2
8	Chaldean	2006	39	1	1
9	Chaldean	1992	36	3	2
10	Assyrian	2003	53	4	1
11	Turkoman Muslim	1995	47	3	1
12	Turkoman Muslim	1994	32	2	1
13	Turkoman Muslim	---	----	2	2
14	Arabic muslim	2000	32	1	1
15	Arabic muslim	2000	41	---	2
16	Turkoman Muslim	---	49	--	1
17	Assyrian	2004	41	3	1
18	Chaldean	2006	35	3	1



Appendix B

The following is a guide that was used for the focus group discussion and interviews.

Personal questions:

1. Name: (optional)
2. DOB: (optional)
3. Residency status: tpv ppv citizen (optional)
4. Date of arrival in Australia:
5. Number of all children:
6. Number of children under 5 of age:
 Genders and ages:
 Males: ages
 Females: ages

Parenting experiences:

7. How can you describe your experience in parenting / looking after child(ren) under 5 years of age?
8. Were the child(ren) in the question male(s) or female(s)? Did that make any difference?
9. Under what circumstances did you parent them? Reasons for parenting. (Looking for the influence of culture on parenting)
10. Did you receive any support from any relevant agencies / organizations for your parenting tasks?
11. Are you aware of any...?
12. Are you still parenting your child(ren)?

Parenting problems and need of support

13. Did you face any problems while parenting your child(ren)? What were they? Any cultural problems? Was the new life (within the new Australian community) a challenge?
14. Are you aware of any rules, laws, systems, in relation to parenting in Australia?
15. Are you aware of any relevant services/
16. Do you feel you need any support for parenting? What kind of support do you need?
17. Any restrictions to access any services? Such as? Child care..etc. Because of what? Residency? Others?

Suggestions and recommendations:

18. Do you have any suggestions in relation to how to be supported? What do you wish?
19. Any other comments?

