

CRAMER STREET NEIGHBOURHOOD PROJECT

Organisations Involved & Contact Details

Organisation: Darebin City Council
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Aims & Target Group

The need

The Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project was a partnership between the Darebin City Council and representatives from the Cramer Street neighbourhood. The central aim was to tackle racial tension amongst people from diverse backgrounds living in the project area. The project aimed to build understanding of diverse cultures through dialogue, by bringing local people together in social settings. The overall aim was to develop resilient neighbour relations that can withstand external pressures such as potential negative media reporting of international crises.

The Project ran in 2002 shortly following the events of September 11, 2001. The Muslim community in the Cramer Street Mosque, which was built in the mid-1970s, had grown steadily over time. This growth placed heavy demands on community infrastructure and, as a result, the neighbourhood tensions began to fester. The project was identified as a way of addressing heightened tension experienced by residents living near the Mosque, due to a number of factors:

- Increased usage of the mosque on Fridays and during Holy day celebrations,
- International events linked to terrorism contributing to a backlash and violence against Arab and Muslim communities, and
- Hostile media reporting of domestic events involving Arab and Muslim communities.

The aim

The Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project set out to achieve the following:

- Develop a neighbourhood-focused program that creates opportunities for neighbours to socialize, mix and enjoy cultural, social and educational activities,
- Minimise isolation and segregation between neighbours arising out of differences in ethnicity, culture, religion and language,
- Reduce conflict in the neighbourhood arising from intolerance of difference,
- Increase understanding and appreciation of difference,
- Promote the concept of an inclusive neighbourhood whereby the Mosque, like the local church and primary school, is accepted as an integral part of the neighbourhood, and





- Bring together key stakeholders from the neighbourhood to lead the project's process and outcomes.

The project used a bundle of associated activities under the banner 'Cramer Street Project' including celebrations, Mosque open days, community BBQ's and seminars. This gave participants the opportunity to learn about each other in a friendly environment and subsequently reduce previously held prejudices and misconceptions.

Project Description & Components

The project used a number of strategies to ensure successful outcome:

1. **Research based:** Problem issues and solutions were based on thorough research
2. **Community Driven Management:** Established a project reference group involving residents and community organisations from the area.
3. **Community Events** including:
 - **Adding value** to existing events and funding new ones,
 - Preston West Primary School **Arts festival** helping to connect residents from diverse backgrounds to the school and to enjoy food, dance and performances,
 - **Women's Intercultural Event** working with a local women's interfaith group to expand one of their annual events,
 - **Multicultural Neighbourhood Festival** in the Cramer Street area on Harmony Day, including a Citizenship Ceremony, performances, community information stalls, and cultural displays,
 - **Intercultural Dialogue Seminar** brought together residents, religious leaders and academics to generate dialogue,
 - **Mosque Open Day** leading up to Ramadan, providing an opportunity for neighbours to interact with people who attend the Mosque and to learn more about Islam,
 - **Community BBQ's** for local residents and Mosque visitors, and
 - **Eid el Fitr Community Day**, when Non-Muslim residents from the local area were invited to share the end of Ramadan celebration. Approximately 30% of participants were non-Muslims. The day included rides, exhibits, decorations, and food.
4. **Communication Strategy:** Included a promotional brochure, an information sheet about key Muslim festivals, regular media releases, web based information, advertisements in local paper and fliers, invitations posted to residents in immediate neighbourhood, and a thank you card sent to local residents at the completion of the project.
5. **Community Capacity Building approach:** A key aim was to foster partnerships and networks that ensured the impact and sustainability of outcomes beyond the funding life of the project. Open learning was core to the process: between participants, residents, and organisations.
6. **Dialogue** All activities were designed to facilitate dialogue and exchange amongst residents.





- 7. Traffic Management.** A key area of tension was parking and traffic around the Cramer Street neighbourhood during key Muslim festivals such as Eid al Fitr. A number of traffic management strategies were put in place, such as signage to ask visitors to park legally, keep noise down and respecting the neighbours' comfort; road closures; assistance from local police; additional parking spaces; information disseminated to the local most; and letters to local residents.

Process

The Cramer Street Neighbourhood Project involved a number of stakeholders such as the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Centrelink, neighbourhood schools, the Uniting and Baptist Churches, and the local TAFE College. The local police were also involved, as were local residential representatives, and Darebin City Council as the main co-ordinating partner.

These stakeholders constituted Project Reference Group (PRG) for the project, which met on a regular basis and discussed ways of improving relations in the neighbourhood. The first step taken by this reference group was to conduct a survey with mosque attendees to profile the community, gauge attitudes and understand the views of local community members. The Cramer Street Neighbourhood project emerged as an outcome of this survey, and in consultation with the reference group.

The PRG continued to play a key role in steering the project throughout its duration. Other critical success factors were the following:

Social Analysis

- The project was informed by causes & impact of racism in the community, including analysis of the current international political climate and its local impact.
- The project focused on a micro community level.
- This enabled the impact of anti-racism strategies to be understood more effectively through evaluation by and direct feedback from the residents in the project area.

Cross Cultural Practice

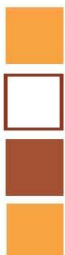
- Council Officer working with the project is fluent in Arabic language and knowledgeable with regard to Arabic culture. These skills were a valuable resource in developing an effective working relationship with the Islamic Society of Victoria.
- The project produced & disseminated translated materials in the top five languages. Information was also made available on Darebin Council's internet and multilingual website.
- The project worker informed and facilitated the involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

Community Driven Management

- The Project Reference Group (PRG) was set up to represent the community organisations and residents from the project area. Strategies implemented took into account the wide spectrum of support offered by several stakeholders and neighbourhood leaders. This also contributed to local capacity building and skill development.
- The information collected via the surveys of residents living in the project area informed the project's direction.
- Links were made with existing local networks and resources to represent and build on the positive outcomes already achieved in the community.

Inclusive Activities

- Activities were planned with the aim of appealing to the diverse aspects of the neighbourhood in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, family groups, newly arrived and long established residents, including two free outdoor festivals, a women's only event, seminars, outdoor barbeque and open days.





- A concurrent community activity such as a Citizenship Ceremony was included in the Harmony Day event to create an opportunity for new residents to be welcomed into the neighbourhood.

Outcomes

Darebin Council recorded an eighty per cent decrease in the number of complaints by neighbours during the month of Ramadan, which is one of the Mosque's peak times for the year. There was also a fifty per cent decrease in the number of traffic infringement notices. This indicated that there had been an increased acceptance of the Mosque in the community, and a greater sense of community belonging by Mosque attendees.

Challenges & Obstacles

- There was discussion in council about the need to present a secular standpoint in these activities.
- There was some suspicion between Muslim and non-Muslim representatives on the interfaith council, which needed to be carefully managed by Darebin Council.
- At one point, a speaker at the Mosque Open Day was controversial and council concluded that tighter vetting of speakers needed to occur.
- A similar controversy arose relating to some of the literature available at the Mosque open day, and was similarly noted for future management by council.

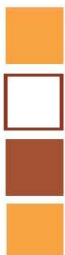
Funding

The project was funded under the Australian Government 's *Living in Harmony* initiative, administered by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). A significant part of the \$50,000 grant funding was used to employ a *LiH* Project Officer for twelve months.

Darebin Council also offered significant support to the project, as follows:

- Hall hire of venues for the activities
- Insurance cover
- Staff time (other than the *LiH* Project Officer) for example in project management, administration, community meetings, website development, promotion and publicity, culture and leisure services, event management, outdoor park and litter management.

Financial constraints were overcome with the support of partner organisations - for example, a significant financial contribution (\$25,000) was made by the Islamic Society of Victoria (ISV) towards the running costs for the Eid el Fitr Community Day celebrations.





Images

