

PhotoVoice – A Regional Community Development Project



The Illawarra Legal Centre was involved in a PhotoVoice project with the local Muslim community in 2005. This was a joint project between the Legal Centre, Illawarra Muslim Women's Association and Illawarra Multicultural Services.

This was the first PhotoVoice project in the Illawarra, whereby 40 Muslim families were provided with disposable cameras to record and reflect on the community's strengths and concerns. This action research project promoted a genuine glimpse into life in the Muslim community, capturing beliefs, fears, struggles and celebration. But most importantly, it promoted a community dialogue for Muslim families and served as a catalyst for change. The photos were a starting point for discussions involving legal and non legal topics.

The project had three objectives:

1. It enabled Muslim families to record and reflect their community's strengths and problems.
2. It promoted a dialogue about important

issues through group discussion

and photographs.

3. It engaged policymakers.

The PhotoVoice project reflected the local identity, culture and character of local Muslim families of the Illawarra region. The project identified legal needs and community issues faced by Muslim women and their families. These issues included issues of workplace discrimination, domestic violence, anti-terrorism laws, concerns with dealing with police and related legal issues.

PhotoVoice allowed discussion of the issues identified. This discussion resulted in providing the group with legal education tools to empower and resolve legal issues. The process not only provided people with greater knowledge of the free legal services available but also resulted in innovative solutions to the issues identified by the Muslim women and their families.

One of the final stages of the project was an exhibition entitled ***Past, Present & Future - A unique photography exhibition from the eyes of the Illawarra Muslim community*** and featured 80 photographs. The exhibition was launched as part of International Human Rights Day 2005 activities and attracted over 100 people. The exhibition was formally launched by Wollongong Deputy Lord Mayor of Wollongong, with special guest speaker Keysar Trad from the Islamic Friendship Society. The Multicultural Choir also provided entertainment.

The exhibition aimed at attracting a broad audience to view the presentation and to educate the wider community about the unique strong Muslim community living in the Illawarra region. People from various backgrounds including government and non government

organizations, youth groups, politicians, and family and friends of the Muslim families involved attended the launch of the exhibition as well as the community as a whole.

The PhotoVoice project has been seen as an innovative approach to educating a culturally diverse group of women and their families.

What the project partners have said about the project:

Maha Elhage-Hadaya from the Illawarra Muslim Women's Association states "there is so much negativity around Muslims today due to recent world events. It's great for the public to be able to see the concerns that face the Muslim community".

Hadijat Lawal, Community Development Worker at Illawarra Multicultural Services states that "the PhotoVoice project was a good opportunity for participating families to share with the wider community that Muslims are as Australian as anyone else, with strength and weakness that shows our humanity. This is a great project."

Jillian Chapman, Community Education Worker at the Illawarra Legal Centre states that "at a time when Muslim communities are feeling marginalised and discriminated against this is an opportunity to celebrate the life of Muslim communities living in Australia. The PhotoVoice project has been a great starting point to discuss legal and non legal issues that Muslim families in the Illawarra region are facing, including discrimination and victimisation. The project has also given participants to opportunity to gain photography skills provided by local community artist Cathi Duff".

A PhotoVoice project has the power to:

- a. Promote and facilitate access to government and non-government services.
- b. Pursue community capacity-building programs that seek to empower particular groups such as Muslim women with the majority whose first language is Turkish and Arabic.
- c. Encourage the development of services,

including CALD services, which meet the needs of these communities.

More information about PhotoVoice available at:

www.photovoice.com/

www.photovoice.org

www.cpe.uts.edu.au/publications/toolbox.html



Illawarra Legal Centre Inc

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www.illawarralegalcentre.org.au