

OUTCOMES OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT WORKSHOPS WITH MUSLIM YOUTH

A PROJECT CONDUCTED BY THE CENTRE FOR APPLIED CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH FOR THE OFFICE OF ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FEDERATION OF ISLAMIC ASSOCIATIONS OF NEW ZEALAND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In pursuing their purpose of strong and connected ethnic communities, the Office of Ethnic Communities contracted the Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research, Victoria University of Wellington, with the support of the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand, to conduct a series of workshops with New Zealand Muslim youth. The objectives of the workshops were to identify the needs and challenges faced by young Muslims and to probe potential solutions about how their needs could best be met. To these ends five workshops were conducted in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch between 3 September and 1 October, 2016.

Ninety-four Muslim youth (57 males and 37 females, aged 15-27 years) participated in the workshops. The participants came from diverse ethnic backgrounds with Indians (17%) and Somalis (16%) representing the largest groups. Thirty-six percent of the participants were born in New Zealand, and an additional 29% arrived in New Zealand before the age of 7 years. Most (78%) participants were students, and 35% were employed.

The youth engaged in three major activities in the workshops. First, they identified key needs and challenges in response to the questions: *What are the major challenges faced by young Kiwi Muslims? What is required to achieve your goals and aspirations?* Second, needs and challenges were subjected to SWOT analyses, where participants assessed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with meeting their prioritised needs. Finally, on the basis of the SWOT analyses, participants generated recommendations about how best to move forward in addressing the needs and challenges for young Muslims.

Thematic analysis was used to identify themes and sub-themes relating to the needs and challenges of New Zealand Muslim youth. Three over-arching themes were identified by workshop participants. The first was Racism and Discrimination. Everyday racism, stereotypes and lack of knowledge about Islam, and racism in the media were the most commonly occurring sub-themes; however, there was also mention of the implications of discrimination for education and employment. The second major theme was Integration: Islam and Community Relations. Integration sub-themes were defined by a set of needs pertaining to cultural and religious maintenance, accommodation of religious practices, acceptance and inclusion, and public education. The third theme, Identity and Belonging, was characterised in terms of negotiations pertaining to parental and peer influence, multiple cultural identities, and commitment to religion. Overall, the needs and challenges identified by young Muslims

in New Zealand reflect the challenges of integration in culturally diverse societies, the aspirations to retain cultural and religious practices while participating in the wider society, and the tensions in determining the degree to which non-Muslims are willing to accept and accommodate the needs of Muslim minorities.

The SWOT analyses pointed to confident and proud Muslim youth and a strong, supportive Muslim community. The strengths were complemented by opportunities to address racism and discrimination and to foster integration by building bridges between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Support from external organisations, such as OEC, and the New Zealand public was seen as important in achieving these goals. Turning inward, youth also saw opportunities for personal growth with the launch of leadership development programmes and the establishment of youth wings of community groups. These strengths and opportunities were countered by weaknesses and threats, which included the negative psychological consequences of exposure to racism, divisiveness and resistance to change within the Muslim community, ignorance about Islam in the non-Muslim community and political “scape-goating” of Muslims.

Thematic analysis of the recommendations based on perceived strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats uncovered five pathways that workshop participants identified to address issues of racism, integration and belonging. These were:

- Promoting public events
- Providing education and information
- Tackling negative stereotyping in the media
- Developing resources for youth, and
- Accommodating religious practices.

See the figure below for a graphic synthesis of the workshop outcomes.

The initiatives recommended by workshop participants could serve to increase contact between Muslims and non-Muslims; provide information and education to counter racism, discrimination and negative media images; involve youth in organisations that enhance civic engagement, community service and empowerment; and support the integration of young Muslims.

