

**Speech at the  
“Sharing Our Achievements - Symposiums on Australian Muslims”  
Jhunu Schrapel , Adelaide, SA May 2007**

**It is a privilege to be invited to speak at this symposium. I would like to talk about myself for a minute which I hope will explain the value base I work from. Then I would like to give you a snapshot of the work we have been doing in the City of Onkaparinga which is aimed at bringing communities together. Our admin staff have also put together a photographic account of the projects we have undertaken over the last couple of years which hopefully will give you an insight about the activities we have undertaken and the participation of our community in our cultural diversity related work.**

**I was born in what was formerly known as East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in a progressive Muslim household. Accordingly I had a Muslim upbringing but within a liberal environment. My parents were involved in various community related activities, my mother was the chair of Red Cross for a number of years. Both my parents were also involved in politics. I got my community development training as a child at home. In my adult life I have always worked in community development settings spanning over three decades in three continents. My working life as a community development worker begun in the rural development field in Bangladesh followed by a long stint in the UK and then in South Australia where I have lived for the past 19 years. I have grown up with Muslim values such as “if you don’t have anything good to say to some one then don’t say anything at all” “Do good if you can”. Values not dissimilar to those of the Christianity and other religions. With that basic teaching I have always endeavoured to work with the community, build social capital, support people to grow and learn and realise their potential. It has also fuelled my work to identify community leaders and support their personal development and to promote tolerance and harmony amongst people of different beliefs and religions.**

**I have a life long commitment to bringing communities together by creating opportunities for people to gain access to information about other cultures and breaking down barriers.**

**An example of that from my past work experience was the creation of the Indian sub-continent Village at Kidman Park Primary School. I was fortunate enough to work for Community Aid Abroad and had the brief to create a hands on learning project for primary school students about life in the Indian sub continent. The goal of that project was to highlight the poverty issues and give primary school students from around South Australia an understanding as what they can do to alleviate world poverty.**

**In my current position as a Community Development Officer with the City of Onkaparinga, I am responsible for promoting cultural diversity. My work is underpinned by the city of Onkaparinga’s commitment to**

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supporting educational awareness programs that promote cultural respect and tolerance.

Over the last few years there has been a steady influx of refugees arriving in South Australia and a large numbers of those are from cultures that are very different from our mainstream communities. The Australian Government and the settlement agencies are actively looking to settle these new arrivals in the South.

The population of City of Onkaparinga is mainly comprised of Anglo Saxon heritage and to date very few people from new and emerging communities have settled in the south. To prepare our community to receive the new arrivals, we developed a plan to deliver a number of activities where we'd bring people from other cultures and our community together to find out about each other's cultures and beliefs through engaging in conversations.

Over the last 18 months we have conducted two seminars and had a community cultural treasures exhibition. We worked collaboratively with Project Abraham and also with the local TAFE English language program. The students and the community participated in the community cultural treasures event on Harmony day. We also launched the project Abraham exhibition at the same event. We invited schools to visit the Project Abraham exhibition and participate in a specially designed program to learn about the similarities between the three Abrahamic faiths – Christianity, Islam and Judaism. One of the seminars provided opportunities to our community in the Southern suburbs to gain an insight about the refugees experience in settlement in South Australia. The second one was part of project Abraham. Religious leaders from the three Abrahamic faiths discussed the connection of Prophet Abraham and related messages of peace that lies at the core of the three faiths.

All the events that we have organised were very successful. We were surprised by the community interest and thirst to gain knowledge about other beliefs and cultures. We plan to continue with this work in the future. Before I conclude I would like to thank the Onkaparinga Council for supporting this work. I am very lucky to be able to do work I thoroughly enjoy and to get paid for it! I have worked for many local authorities both in the UK and in South Australia and in my opinion Onkaparinga is the most progressive in promoting community cohesion through a concerted approach to the building of understanding and tolerance amongst diverse cultures and religions.

It is hard to pack in a life time of work in 10 minutes, therefore I have only really skimmed across the surface of my work journey. I live, breathe and embrace cultural and religious diversity in my personal and professional life ... and highly recommend it for all Australians!

Thank you for listening and I am happy to answer any queries as the night progresses.

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