



**youth affairs network qld**

**YOUNG MUSLIM WOMEN'S  
PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS AND  
RECREATION**

(30 June 2008)



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The Multicultural Youth Network of Queensland (MYNQ) is a community driven, state wide network of service providers committed to multiculturalism and improving the opportunities and outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse young people in Queensland. If you would like to join MYNQ, or find out more, please contact The Multicultural Development Officer, The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland, 30 Thomas St, West End Qld 4101; or email [cald@yanq.org.au](mailto:cald@yanq.org.au).

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## About YANQ

### *About YANQ*

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc. (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. YANQ advocates on behalf of young people in Queensland, especially disadvantaged young people, to government and the community. The interests and well being of young people across the state are promoted by YANQ in the following ways:

- Disseminating information to members, the youth sector, and the broader community;
- Undertaking campaigns and lobbying;
- Making representations to government and other influential bodies;
- Resourcing regional and issues-based networks;
- Consulting and liaising with members and the field;
- Linking with key state and national bodies;
- Initiating projects;
- Hosting forums and conferences;
- Input into policy development; and
- Enhancing the professional development of the youth sector.

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## Glossary

<i>CCN</i>	Crescents Community News
<i>Hadith</i>	Accounts of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and deeds
<i>Hijab</i>	Head scarf or veil, (sometimes interpreted as the fuller covering, the burqa)
<i>IFA</i>	Islamic Female Association
<i>Imam</i>	The person who leads prayers in the mosque
<i>Qur'an</i>	The holy book of Islam
<i>Ramadan</i>	The month of fasting (the ninth month in the Islamic calendar)
<i>Shari'a</i>	Islamic Law



# Young Muslim Women's Participation in Sports and Recreation

## Introduction

Sports is very much part of the Australian culture. Although sports itself is a universal activity, it is also a uniquely Australian affair shaped by what is often referred to as the Australian lifestyle, and backed by masses of fans. Sport in Australia provides a source of cultural and social glue – uniting people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to a common sporting goal, which in turn shapes a particular type of Australian identity.

Yet sports and recreational activities in Australia are not always entirely inclusive, particularly for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups such as Muslim young women. Physical, cultural, social, economic and religious barriers may limit Muslim young women's participation in sports and recreation.

The aim of this research is to identify and analyse socio-cultural barriers affecting Muslim young women's participation in sports and recreation and to develop strategies that promote a greater participation in sports and recreation by young Muslim women in Queensland. It must be noted however, that some of the restrictions revealed by the study apply to a greater extent to those practising Muslim women who wear the *hijab* or *burqa*, since some Muslim women may not face the same physical or socio-cultural limitations. The objectives of this research then are to:

- Engage Muslim young women in southeast Queensland in the data collection process to develop their research and leadership capacity;
- List and describe the type of sports and recreational activities that Muslim young women prefer to get involved in;
- Identify barriers and factors that limit Muslim young women's participation in sports and recreation at family and community levels;
- Develop recommendations and strategies for key stakeholders involved in the planning and delivery of sports and recreational activities that provide practical solutions to addressing the needs of Muslim young women; and
- Explore culturally responsive and inclusive delivery of sports and recreational activities for Muslim young women in Queensland.

In addition, it must be noted that for the purposes of this research, 'sports' includes both team and individual physical activities that promote health, fitness and well being.

## Brief History of Muslims in Australia

The Muslims from Macassar in southern Sulawesi were the first Muslims to come into contact with Australia around the 1700s. The Macassans were fishermen, catching sea slugs to sell in the lucrative Chinese market.<sup>1</sup> The evidence of Macassan fishermen along the coasts of the Northern Territory can be found in the local Aboriginal languages, where Macassan words like *balanda* ("white men") and *rupiah* ("money") were adopted.<sup>2</sup> In 1901, the *Immigration Restriction Act* was introduced, which resulted in the termination of visits by the Macassans.

During the stages of European settlement, the British employed Muslims as sailors, labourers and camel drivers. The latter include famous Afghans who accompanied European colonials in their

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<sup>1</sup> Cleland, B. 2001. 'The History of Muslims in Australia'. In Saeed, A. & Akbarzadeh, S. *Muslim Communities in Australia*. UNSW Press: Sydney, NSW.

<sup>2</sup> Saeed, A. 2003. *Islam in Australia*. Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest, NSW.

expedition to expand settlement into Australia's interior. The construction of the Overland Telegraph Line between 1870 and 1872 and the Coolgardie gold rush in 1894 are proof of the efforts of the Afghan camel drivers in establishing access to the vast interior. Through the employment of Afghans as camel drivers, small Muslim communities began to emerge. However, the emergence of Muslim communities was not without resistance and discrimination. In the 1890s, the union movement in Queensland undertook a major vilification campaign against Muslim camel drivers, prompting the decline in Muslim migration to Australia.

It was not until after the Second World War that there was a significant increase in the number of Muslims migrating to Australia. These included Turks, Albanians, Bosnians and Lebanese, settling mainly in New South Wales and Victoria. More recently, Australia's Muslim population also include people born in Iran, Fiji, Iraq, Egypt, Albania, Palestine, India and southeast Asian countries. This diversity of countries represented by the Australian Muslim population is contrary to the common perception of a homogeneous Muslim community in Australia. Saeed and Akbarzadeh (2001:2) state that "misconceived assumptions about the social and ethnic background of Muslims have often led to a neglect of their diverse social and ethnic heritage. This in turn, has reinforced the idea that there is a single Muslim community with uniform needs and aspirations".

## A Snapshot of the Muslim Population in Queensland

The most recent figures from the ABS 2006 census indicate that there are 20,321 persons who identify themselves as Muslim living in Queensland. This accounts for 0.52% of the State's total population, a figure that is significantly lower than the 1.7% of Australians nationwide who self-identify as Muslim. Of the Muslim population in Australia, 5.96% reside in Queensland while the vast majority live in New South Wales (49.57 %) and Victoria (32.12%). Despite this, Islam is the third most common religion in Queensland, with Christianity (66.29%) being the dominant religion followed by Buddhism (1.21%).

In Queensland, the Muslim population is relatively young, with the highest proportion of Muslim people in the state (18.85%) being in the 15 to 24 year age group. This is a significantly higher percentage than that related to the number of the total Queensland population who also fall into that age group (15.0%). The second highest proportion of people within the Muslim population in Queensland is persons aged between 25 and 34 years (18.62%).

## Muslim Women

The role of women in Islam has always been scrutinised and criticised by the West, with strong Western perceptions of Muslim women being defenceless and oppressed within the Islamic world. In support of the earlier statement made by Saeed and Akbarzadeh, Fawzi El-Soh and Mabro (1994) argue that the heterogeneity of the Muslim population, including the diverse factors which contribute to the status of Muslim women are largely ignored in Western societies.

Fawzi El-Soh and Mabro (1994) explains that patriarchy is no more prevalent in Islam than it is in Judaism or Christianity, and the negative stereotype of Muslim women has been due to the assumption that "since gender relations are rather strictly formalized in the *Qur'an*, in the *Hadith*, and in *Shari'a*; and since these religious and legal doctrines are seen by many Muslims as eternal and universal; and since women are unequal under these theological and legal doctrines, women are seen as enduring a universal and uniform state of subjugation" (Hale in Fawzi El-Soh and Mabro 1994:4). On the contrary, Omar and Allen (1996) state that both men and women are referred to as being equal in the eyes of God, Allah. Bridges (2000) and Heathgrow (2001) agree, contending that there is nothing in the *Qur'an* that indicates that men and women should be unequal, and that followers of Islam were among the first people who were feminist in their approach to areas of gender based subjugation.

Indeed, some authors (Bridges 2000, Hargreaves 2001, Heathgrow 2001, and Roald 2001) argue that

the perception that Muslim women are subjugated is a western originating and dominated idea, based almost entirely on western comparison of these policies to a relatively more 'liberal' west. This is especially so in the case of the *hijab*, where some western people have viewed it as a symbol of oppression. Many Muslim women however, perceive the *hijab* as an avenue to express personal respect, spiritual decision, revolt against foreign influence and a symbol of religious heritage. Further, Hargreaves (2001) suggests that western view of *hijab* in a negative way compared with western view of veils worn by Catholic nuns shows that the west rejects what is foreign because of 'insider'/ 'outsider' social politics. To this point, Muslim women's *hijab* is one of the contested practices of Islam, some arguing that the head scarf can be seen as either liberating or oppressing women. In Islam, modest and unprovocative clothing is to be worn by both men and women. The practical use of the *hijab* becomes significant in the course of this study, as a later section shows the impracticalities of the use of the *hijab* for some physical and/or sporting activities (eg. that excessive exercise on hot days while wearing *hijab* can lead to heat exhaustion).

Despite these differing perspectives of Muslim women, the role of Muslim women within families and communities is embedded in fundamental principles of Islam. Women are assigned the responsibility of child-rearing and men are assigned the task of providing the material needs of the family. Omar and Allen (1996:18) argue that women have the "highest status in society and the ones most worthy of care and respect" by virtue of being mothers. Furthermore, Islam provides freedom to women in deciding their choice of participation in educational, economic and political life.

## Young Muslims

### *Current Social Framework*

Since the occurrence of the Cronulla riots in November 2005, there has been a lot of attention placed on Muslim young people. The common misunderstanding as noted by many Muslim scholars is the association of "Arab" with "Islam". Therefore, the young people of 'middle eastern appearance' are instantly thought of as being Muslims, whilst heterogeneity of the Muslim population in Australia will state otherwise. The Australian and western media have also played a role in the generation of some social tension affecting some Muslim communities, especially evident in the ways that Australian media report events serves to construct a difference between Muslims and 'all other Australians'. Such a dynamic also constructs an image of Muslim Australia that is unable to negotiate Islamic beliefs and 'the Australian way of life'. This imagery not only hinges on a uniform Anglo Australian culture that does not exist, but also fails to recognise the complexities involved in *anyone's* culture. This 'establishment' of Anglo culture as primordial and as a base to which all other cultures are compared, reflects an historically common, ethnocentricity that has recently been targeted and deconstructed by many contemporary researchers in the social-cultural fields. For example, just as white people in western countries are often deemed to be 'without race', Anglo Australia is similarly often self-perceived as being 'without culture', except for when non-white Australians deviate from its norms. (i.e. Anglo Australians do what they do (behaviour wise) because 'that is the right way it should be done' rather than 'because that behaviour reflects their cultural upbringing and socialisation'.)

This sentiment can also be seen in statements sometimes found in online forums or overheard in streets and shopping centres about Australian Muslims wearing the *hijab* and *burqa*; statements such as "Muslim women should wear whatever they want". Superficially, such declarations may seem to be positively advocating for women's rights, but often, sentiments like these are misdirected at Muslim women in Australia who have freely chosen by reasoning of their faith to wear the *hijab* and/or the *burqa*. As Murray (2002) mentions, such statements often actually serve to disempower rather than empower women. In some cases, although the utterance includes "wear whatever they want", it actually means "wear westernised clothing like other non-Muslim Australian women", as though the speaker could not fathom anyone actually wanting to dress so differently. Such inferences wrongly imply that any Muslim woman who chooses to wear the *hijab* is being forced to do so, and that the 'right way' to dress is like that of a liberal, westernised woman; it is an ethnocentric viewpoint, but unfortunately one that is rife and sometimes unnoticeably so amongst many Anglo-Australians. Therefore, not only are the socio-politics of wearing the *hijab* in Australia complex, but

there is also a veil of ethnocentrism through which many Muslims have to struggle in order to gain the understanding of other Australians.

Similarly, the 'September 11' attacks on the World Trade Centre also affected social cohesion in Australia, with the 'retaliation' torching on a mosque in Brisbane, and the labelling by some Anglo-Australians of some people of Middle Eastern descent or appearance as terrorists. This showed the danger of the adherence to a phenotypic stereotype, and served as an unfortunate catalyst for the social tension to which some Muslim people are currently subject.

### *Socio-Cultural Dynamics*

In addition to the issues faced by young people generally, Islamic youth are exposed to pressures from their parents, families, communities and the wider society, namely the need for upholding Islamic values and heritage. Mainstream culture is often looked at critically by the Muslim population and therefore, Muslim young people who are seen to adopt such culture may be subject to disapproval from their parents. Omar and Allen (1996) explain that Muslim young people are influenced by a combination of mainstream Australian society, Islamic culture and their ethnic background. As a result, some Muslim young people decide to turn away from their Muslim culture and assimilate to the wider-Australian society, and some may be living a "double life" in which they practice as a Muslim at home but not in the public realm (Omar and Allen 1996:48). There are also Muslim young people who are inclined to classical Islam and yet others may be more liberal in their approach to living in a non-Muslim society.

## Muslim Women and Sports

Literature on Muslim women's participation in sports is relatively scarce, especially specifically in relation to an Australian setting.

Bickerton (2006) wrote about the uplifting of Iran's ban on women attending football matches in 2006. The campaign against the banning of women at football games originates in 1995 when thousands of women marched into the Freedom Stadium in Tehran to celebrate the victory of Iran's national soccer team in qualifying for the 1998 World Cup tournament.

Lyons (1988 – in Hargreaves 1994) states that a "study of Muslim women in Birmingham suggests that their especially low participation rates is the single most important factor linked to poor health, provides a persuasive reason to organise sports programmes for Asian women." She also acknowledges (as does Hargreaves 1994) that while not all Muslims are Asian, and not all Asians come from one homogenous ethnic group, racial stereotypes do play a role in some Muslim women's participation in sport. Further, Lyons (1988) warns that racial and ethnic stereotypes about women and sports (the same that lead some people to believe that 'white' women are good at sport because they have trained hard, and that 'black' women are good at sport because they are naturally, biologically predisposed to having athletic prowess) means that Asian women are often seen as too delicate or feminine to participate or want to participate in sports, and therefore their absence is largely overlooked when they are excluded. This has resulted in the recent targeting of Asian women groups to promote sport in the Birmingham and wider areas.

On a professional and international level, Muslim women have been engaged in sporting activities including the Olympic Games, and the relatively recently established Muslim Women's Games (formerly the Islamic Countries' Women's Games, which were established by Faezeh Hashemi). However, despite their participation in the Olympic Games, there remains some debate as to the politics involved in Muslim women taking part. For example, at the 1992 Olympics, Algerian woman Hassiba Boulmerka's win in the 1500 metres track event was denounced and Boulmerka was subsequently forced into exile by Algerian Muslim fundamentalists who accused her of "running with naked legs in front of thousands of men" and also posted death threats against her (Boulmerka had worn men's running shorts for the course of the event). Despite this, many other Muslim women have

participated (both with and without the *hijab*) in Olympic level events in such sports as kayaking, shooting and ice skating, with great support from their countrymen.

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Controversy yet surrounds Muslim women's participation in the Olympic Games though, especially in relation to uniforms and clothing worn by those taking part. "According to Dr. Ghafouri Fard, the head of the Physical Education Organization of Iran, the leaders of world sport have created a cruel imposition whereby Muslim women are "deprived of taking part in

World and Olympic events due to having their Islamic cover." (Salam Iran, November 28, 2001) He goes on to criticize the International Olympic Committee (I.O.C.) for the cruel violation of human rights to exclude these women from the world's athletic stage" (Murray, 2003). This however, is a claim fiercely opposed by Anita Defrantz, U.S. representative to the I.O.C., who says that the "I.O.C. does not assume the responsibility of dictating what can and cannot be worn during the Games. Uniform regulations are left up to each national federation. ... There is no rule that would prohibit wearing the *hijab* in the Olympic Games. No person is barred from the Olympic Games because of their faith" (Murray, 2002). Indeed, Murray (2002) offers as a possible explanation for the absence of a large number of *hijab*-wearing women at the Olympic games as related to "issues of practicality, interest or homeland athletic opportunities".

On a much smaller scale, in relation to a school setting, many schools don't offer single sex classes for Physical Education (PE), many PE teachers are male, and it is generally a male dominated subject area. Often, teachers and schools do not have the resources for separate programs. In addition, Australian media coverage of sporting activities tends to favour male dominated sports like rugby league, rugby union, cricket, car racing and basketball, with very little attention being given to even the leading women's teams in these events, especially on commercial channels. Furthermore, what little coverage there is on Australian commercial television of women's participation in sporting or fitness activities tends to include aerobics, tennis, netball, volleyball and swimming, all activities in which the standard uniform is relatively tight, short, and/or quite revealing. Cheerleading troupes, whose performances on the sporting field, albeit on the sidelines of male dominated football, also contribute to what some people perceive as the sexualisation of women in sports. Hargreaves (1994:259) also notes some of these issues, adding that during Ramadan especially, Muslim women "can become ill if they are physically active". The combination of these significant factors serves to alienate young women, and young Muslim women in particular, and does not lend sporting and fitness activities to being something that is encouraged amongst traditionally conservative groups.

Because of segregation of male and female sports in 'home' countries, some Muslim immigrants to Australia may act to influence their daughters to maintain these customs and the 'old' country's way of life. While this may superficially be an issue of cultural conflict, the process of acculturation and the readiness by which younger people usually undertake it means that this can evolve into an issue of intergenerational contestation.

All of these factors, and the ever-present need for many young Muslim women to adhere to the choice for relatively conservative clothing even while participating in sporting and fitness related activities has seen the emerging role of Ahiida, an Islamic sporting wear company that has released the hijood (a hybrid of the hijab and a hood) and the burqini (a hybrid version of the burqa and bikini). Ahiida's founder Aheda Zanetti, who migrated to Australia from Lebanon at the age of two, created the label in response to her own and her family's desire for Islamic-appropriate sporting wear that did neither restricted the physical movements nor contributed to the overheating of its wearer. Ahiida explains "As an active person who liked to participate in community activities and sport, I found myself restricted due to cultural and religious beliefs. As years went by, I noticed [that] there are younger girls and women that are embracing Islam and obeying their Islamic belief in dressing modestly, [and] in turn, having to miss out on opportunities ... [like] taking part in any sporting activities that Australia has to offer. By facing this on a daily basis and seeing girls struggle with what is around presently, we at Ahiida have found a need to make specialized sportswear to suit the Muslim female." [<http://www.ahiida.com>]. While respondents to YANQ's project also mentioned the relevance of Islamic swimwear and sporting wear, and the importance of Ahiida's role in providing these to the Muslim communities of Australia, still other factors (such as the high financial cost of obtaining such clothing) hindered their choice to participate in sport.

## Conclusion

Clearly, although sporting and fitness related activities are very popular pastimes in Australia, women and particularly Muslim women face a range of issues that either hinder or discourage their participation in such activities.

Two of the major issues that need to be examined in relation to young Muslim women's participation in sports are: 1) Muslim women need a private space away from men where they can feel free to participate in sporting and health related activities and 2) clothing regulations. This latter point is applicable both in the sense that a) those women who choose to wear the *hijab*, *burqa* or a range of other relatively loose, conservative clothing are sometimes physically restricted from participating in sports due to the limitations this attire place on their range of movement, and b) the danger that these women face in overheating, given that layers of clothing are not generally conducive to maintaining an optimum body temperature while exercising. In addition, some Muslim women's desire to wear clothing appropriate to their religious and/or cultural beliefs needs to be recognised in the uniform restrictions of sporting clubs and groups, with the latter incorporating or allowing for variations to set standards of dress. Indeed, these are all issues which also arose from the data collection phase of this project.

Furthermore, external factors hold enormous significance in women's decisions not to participate in sporting activities and the support or otherwise they receive for doing so from society in general. These factors include: 1) the construction of sporting norms in Australia (e.g. uniforms, mixed gender settings, the domination of men), 2) gender issues in general (e.g. limited funding or recognition of women in sports, especially on commercial television broadcasts, the representation of women on the sporting field, the sexualisation of women's sporting attire) and 3) issues of race (e.g. as Hargreaves 1994 acknowledges: western stereotypes that black women athletes need very little if any training in order to do well in sports, Asian women athletes are too slight of build to be taken seriously in sport and white women must try hard to succeed in sport).

In addressing each of these issues and the depth of their connotations, not only should the health of young Muslim women improve, but there should also be greater social cohesion, something that would be of benefit to all people in Australia.

## Results

### Introduction

Research methods employed for the data collection period (from March through June 2007) of this study involved: the dissemination of surveys (both in hard copy and electronic form), the conducting of interviews, and the facilitation of focus groups. About seventy respondents and informants were located across Queensland, with participants from Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Respondents to the electronic survey were from across Queensland, and potentially from outside of these centres. Because YANQ employed a marriage of data collection methods, any potential for the skewing of data collected from the modest sample of survey material would be offset by the data obtained through interviews and focus groups; this results in a well rounded, well balanced report. In addition, many questions were open ended, and respondents and informants could reply as they wished, providing a wealth of qualitative data that could be analysed accordingly. No question was compulsory and respondents could remain anonymous. Participants for this project were located via word of mouth, through advertisements in online Islamic newsletters (like CCN and IFA), and through existing and emerging networks within the Muslim communities in Brisbane and across Queensland. Faiza El-Higzi, the co-founder and then president of Al-Nisa Youth Group Inc and other representatives from Al-Nisa Youth Group Inc contributed a great deal of time and resources to this project and facilitated focus groups and meetings throughout this period.

The data collection, and *ipso facto* the results of the study adhered to the aims of this research project, which are to:

1. Engage Muslim young women in southeast Queensland in the data collection process to develop their research and leadership capacity;
2. List and describe the type of sports and recreational activities that Muslim young women prefer to get involved in;
3. Identify barriers and factors that limit Muslim young women's participation in sports and recreation at family and community levels;
4. Develop recommendations and strategies for key stakeholders involved in the planning and delivery of sports and recreational activities that provide practical solutions to addressing the needs of Muslim young women; and
5. Explore culturally responsive and inclusive delivery of sports and recreational activities for Muslim young women in Queensland.

Responses to each of these aims are outlined on pages 13-28. Generally, the consensus from young Muslim women was that they would like to and already do participate in sports and physical activities that promote their health and well being. Major barriers to their participation in sporting activities that were commonly cited include (but are not limited to): access to venues (both financially and geographically) and lack of Islamic sporting wear, along with the incapacity for many sporting venues to be female only spaces. The vast majority of participants saw Muslim women's participation in sports as a positive occurrence.

The following is a note on the demographic and other information related to respondents and informants, including a few of the participants' ideas about this research project. As mentioned earlier, responses to each one of the project aims can be found after that, and a list of recommendations in brief will conclude (for more details of these, see aims 4 and 5). We now turn to a brief note on the respondents/informants.

### A Note on Research Participants

Respondents ranged in age from 12 to 28, although some participants chose not to identify their age

group. Some respondents were full time students in primary, high school, university and other educational institutions, while others were not students at all. Some mothers of young Muslim women (who themselves may also have been able to identify in that category) also participated in the study, providing valuable insight and a different point of view to the intricacies of young Muslim women's participation (or otherwise) in sports.

Respondents and informants described themselves (their ethnic and/or cultural identity) in the following ways (note: the following are actual responses from research participants):

- Cultural identity Australian Muslim, Ethnic identity Pakistani
- Afghani
- Sri Lankan blood, Southern African upbringing.
- I'm Thai, just moved to Australia 3 months ago. Spend most of my life in Thailand but done heaps of travelling.
- I am half Ethiopian and half Somalian
- I'm from south east Asia
- I'm Malaysian
- I'm a Malay Muslim. Majority of Malay in my country are Muslims. Sports are introduced to us since primary school. So its either we want to get involve in sport seriously or not is our choices.
- Muslim. I'm an Asian living in multicultural country. Participate in sports is encourage!
- Australian revert
- South African Muslim
- I am an Indonesian Muslim.
- Pakistani Muslim (female)
- Sudanese with Egyptian heritage, Muslim
- Muslim

This variety serves to reinforce that Muslim women are not an homogenous group, and that many different ethnicities and cultures contribute not only to this study but to society. In addition, because Muslim communities have different backgrounds and cultures from one another (and even within a single community), any strategies from this report must also acknowledge that (i.e. It would be impossible to benefit all young Muslim women if a strategy involves only young Muslim women with (for example) Indonesian Australian cultural backgrounds). A prime example of this appears in the research finding that while Islam encourages physical well being and the participation of women in health and sporting activities, the cultural practices and ideals of some more conservative Muslim families do not. This means that some Muslim women will face a challenge within their own cultural/religious priorities in relation to sport, let alone having to deal with issues such as transport and access to facilities.

*Some initial feedback and suggestions from respondents/informants about this study:*

Generally, the feedback from participants was very positive, and many of them highlighted the fact that while they are encouraged to take part in a multitude of sports, sporting activities must be undertaken in appropriate environments, and involve acts that are not in opposition with the values of the Muslim faith.

Samples of the feedback received from respondents in relation to the study itself and/or other comments relating to the research content are as follows (again, these are actual comments by respondents):

It's a great idea, I hope Muslim women can partake [sic] in the sports they wish and not have to compromise anything. I also hope nobody else is as lazy as I am.

*Online survey respondent, age withheld.*

This is a great chance for us women to be doing something to help our health and I think if we could choose a sport soccer would be the best along with various others. Thank you, my regards.

*Online survey respondent, age 14.*

All Muslim women should participate in sport.  
*Online survey respondent, age 19.*

I would say the participation is not because of outside influence, it's more of the inner self will. If they really want to do it, they will find a way how to do it without giving up the religion.  
*Online survey respondent, age 24.*

Not many women into sport. I don't think it's because of lack of facilities or religion. It's just they really don't have interest in sports, that's all.  
*Online survey respondent, age 21.*

The main thing is just making people aware of any women only sporting activities.  
*Online survey respondent, age 17.*

If Muslim women do want to do sports and are limited due to religion matters, they should perhaps do it at home or in a closed room with other women as well...perhaps they can do aerobics!  
*Online survey respondent, age 15.*

It is very important to me to be involved in sports and I do not want this to disappear after I finish school but it might because there not many other avenues.  
*Online survey respondent, age 16.*

I think it would be really good if they consider more about Muslim girls and give them the opportunities to join sporting events/clubs. There are things which are stopping them (e.g. sporting wear) and it would be great if these things could be solved.  
*Survey respondent, age 14.*

I love sports and I would love to participate but maybe a couple of things pull me back from being interested.  
*Survey respondent, age 14½.*

Most of the Muslim community loves playing sport. We all enjoy it and like to all have fun. The things like the lack of Islamic sport wear is the only thing that is stopping us from playing sport.  
*Survey respondent, age 13.*

Thank you for taking the time to listen to what Muslim women would like to have in the community.  
*Survey respondent, age 20.*



## Responses to Aims of Study

1. *Engage Muslim young women in southeast Queensland in the data collection process to develop their research and leadership capacity;*

See acknowledgements.

2. *List and describe the type of sports and recreational activities that Muslim young women prefer to get involved in;*

This section describes the types of sporting and physical activities that young Muslim women are already involved in and which ones they would like to be involved in, and provides an additional commentary in specific relation to the appropriateness of certain venues for these activities. In addition, this section explains how participants in this study react to and feel about compulsory sporting activities at schools and educational institutions, as well as how they feel about sports in general.

The table below describes, from survey results, general interest in sports by young Muslim women.

	Very	Interested	Slightly	Not	Definitely Not
Interested in keeping fit	17	10	6	NIL	1
Interested in watching sports	7	11	8	5	3
Interested in playing sports	13	15	2	2	2

(34 responses to survey)

From the table above, it can be seen that the young Muslim women who took part in the survey are quite interested in keeping fit and taking part in sporting activities. Some of them are also interested in taking on a spectator role in sports. However, although the data in this table shows that the motivation to participate is strong, it does not account for the difference in the actual number of respondents who are already committed to take part in sporting or fitness related activities. These factors are discussed in greater detail on pages 14-28.

Further, on average, there was a remarkable correlation between the respondents' ages and their interest or otherwise in sports or fitness related activities<sup>1</sup>. Similar results were found through the focus groups and interviews.

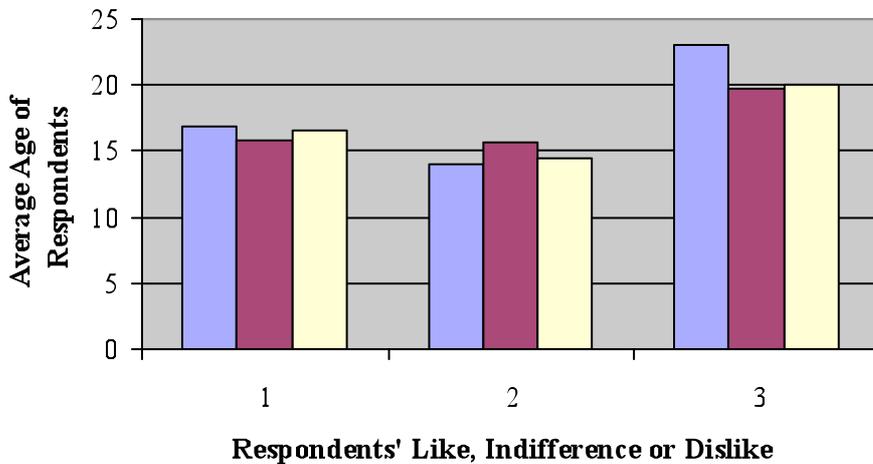
The following chart shows the average ages of:

- 1) Respondents who like keeping fit (blue), watching sports (maroon), or playing sports (yellow);
- 2) Respondents who were indifferent, or only slightly interested in keeping fit (blue), watching sports (maroon), or playing sports (yellow); and
- 3) Respondents who were not interested in keeping fit (blue), watching sports (maroon), or playing sports (yellow).

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<sup>1</sup> This correlation was identified through using survey data and although not specifically obtained through interviews, was also intimated throughout these other methods of data collection.

**By Age, Respondents' Like of Keeping Fit, Watching Sports or Playing Sports**



**Key:**

-  Blue = keeping fit
-  Maroon = watching sports
-  Yellow = playing sports

- 1 = shows great interest in
- 2 = shows indifference or only slight interest in
- 3 = shows no interest in

From the table, it becomes evident that the older respondents (perhaps indicating those who have already completed their secondary school studies) are less interested in keeping fit, watching sports, or playing sports than their school-age counterparts. This indicates that it would likely be necessary to develop multiple strategies to target women in the differing age groups in order to engage or reengage them in sporting or fitness activities.



*Research participants are currently involved in the following sports and activities:*

<b>Individual activities</b>	<b>Team sports</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Athletics/cross country</li> <li>• Backyard sports with siblings</li> <li>• Cycling (bike rides)</li> <li>• Exercises</li> <li>• Handball</li> <li>• Just general exercise at home</li> <li>• Karate</li> <li>• Physical education at school</li> <li>• Running around school oval</li> <li>• Swimming</li> <li>• Walking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Badminton</li> <li>• Basketball</li> <li>• Footy</li> <li>• Gymnastics</li> <li>• Hockey</li> <li>• Netball</li> <li>• Rugby</li> <li>• Soccer</li> <li>• Tennis</li> <li>• Touch footy</li> <li>• Volleyball</li> </ul>

For those respondents of school age, the majority of sports were school based sporting activities. Some respondents said they were not involved in sports or physical activities at all.

*Research participants hope to be involved in the following sports and activities:*

<b>Individual activities</b>	<b>Team sports</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dancing [although one respondent said, “it’s hard to find a suitable dance that’s interesting and that you don’t need a male as a partner”.]</li> <li>• Horse riding</li> <li>• Ice skating</li> <li>• Martial arts</li> <li>• Running</li> <li>• Surfing</li> <li>• Swimming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All and any sporting activities</li> <li>• Basketball</li> <li>• Cricket</li> <li>• Frisbee (Ultimate)</li> <li>• Netball</li> <li>• Soccer</li> <li>• Tennis</li> <li>• Touch football</li> <li>• Volleyball</li> <li>• Water polo</li> </ul>

Note, respondents’ mentioning of Ultimate Frisbee indicates that this is the organised team version rather than simply throwing around the flying disc. The latter form of this activity of course, could be added to the column of individual activities. In addition, some respondents stated that they would like to be involved in “fun sports”, however, due to the extreme subjective nature of such a comment, it has been impossible to place it in either column of this table.

Overall, many respondents and informants were enthusiastic about participating in sport, especially if something were provided for young Muslim women in their area. Because many of the sports listed appear in both lists, this would indicate that the capacity for young Muslim women to participate in sporting activities already exists. However, there is still the question of access (affordability and location), as well as venues and clothing related to modesty or women only venues. Also, issues arose related to the age of women, for example younger participants (as issues of modesty arise more when they’re older), as well as to different locations. Therefore, it is a suggestion that further study be placed on specific areas/locations and what sport is desired by which groups (e.g. People in the Cairns region might want swimming, while those living in Brisbane might want soccer). Of course, with such diversity amongst Muslim groups or female groups in general, it would be impossible to appease the needs and desires of everyone in the community simultaneously. Rather, strategies undertaken should allow the merged or complementary implementation of a number of options/recommendations, and use this as a foundation for further action. Because of the enormity of such a task, and the wide geographic footprint of the study, action groups should be established in each region across Queensland to account for this.

### Venues

The table below provides a brief list of venues where participants claim they already access sporting activities. Note: these are actual responses from research participants, and here have been grouped into home versus venue categories.

<b>Home/local</b>	<b>Sporting facility or venue</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Around where I live</li> <li>• Backyard</li> <li>• Home with my family; at home</li> <li>• Home, but would love to have affordable access to a young women's only or women's only sporting facilities</li> <li>• Inside my home (e.g. skipping) I don't access any</li> <li>• Mostly school</li> <li>• Park</li> <li>• School</li> <li>• My room</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anywhere, often Chandler Sports Complex</li> <li>• Dunlop pool</li> <li>• Fernwood Chermshire</li> <li>• Indoor sports</li> <li>• Local sports field</li> <li>• Toombul</li> <li>• University</li> <li>• University gym</li> </ul>

Other (again, actual) responses that connoted other issues or that could be interpreted as either home-based or sporting venue specific included:

- Home (Saudi Arabia);
- Indoor sports [included as part of the sporting venue list in the above table];
- School [included as part of the home/local list in the above table, due to the likelihood of these activities being cost free and/or participated in as part of the school curriculum];
- Public places;
- N/A [participants either did not mention venue, or thought it was of no consequence];

For the Mackay focus group, the majority of sports were school based sporting activities.

The above table and further list indicate that a large number of young Muslim women participate in sporting activities within the home; whether in the back yard, in the house, or in their room, privacy is a key factor related to this finding. In addition, other connotations may apply: perhaps no transport is available, or no appropriate sporting venue is close by, and these issues force young Muslim women into the home arena. (Indeed, these factors will be discussed in further detail in the following section regarding 'barriers' to participation.) Strategies to increase young Muslim women's participation in sports therefore should be twofold: 1) work with these findings to create more options for home-based sporting activities, and 2) increase the options available to young Muslim women in relation to sports so that they also feel comfortable exercising outside of the home environment.

To work with the fact that a large number of young Muslim women participate in sporting activities around the home environment, private tutors for certain activities could be hired by small groups, therefore having expert training brought to their home. However, despite the apparent benefits of these suggestions, affordability is another concern, as personalized training groups are often expensive to organize, and transport may still be an issue for women travelling to someone else's home to make benefit of the training. Alternatively, many respondents indicated that hiring a venue would be affordable and viable, and could easily be done, and would allow total control of the facility, enabling there to be a women's only space that is also understanding of Muslim women's cultural and religious sensibilities. In some cases, home-based activities with siblings were mentioned. While this is currently suitable for the respondents in question, such activities may lead to issues as the girls and their male relatives mature and modesty issues related to gender identities arise.

Clearly though, from the list above, the major themes of location are: 1) localised, home-based or neighbourhood based venues and 2) school and university venues. Of course, others do not conform to this observation, but affordability and privacy are also major themes throughout.

*How participants feel about compulsory school sports:*

Respondents were asked how they felt about compulsory sports at schools and other educational institutions. The following table provides a list of actual responses to that question:

<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative or indifferent</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy and energetic. Because I love sports and enjoy getting fit</li> <li>• Happy about it</li> <li>• I feel interested in participating because sometimes it's a fun sport eg. Swimming</li> <li>• Yes, because I love sport. It's fun</li> <li>• Sometimes I feel really sad because we should all "have to" do sport because it keeps us fit and healthy and most girls aren't getting enough exercise each day (school sometimes makes compulsory sport)</li> <li>• I feel happy because I like to play sport to become sporterwoman</li> <li>• I don't mind having to participate because I like sport</li> <li>• Good because its healthy and important for my body</li> <li>• Excited because I have never really had a chance to take part before</li> <li>• I enjoy it most of the time because it's fun</li> <li>• I have finished school and uni, but I would have absolutely loved the opportunity to play sport. However I was never given the chance (i.e. No young women only) space to play any sport, where I was.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It depends on whether I am in the mood</li> <li>• I hate it because I don't feel comfortable when people are watching</li> <li>• I don't like it because I don't like to be forced to do something</li> <li>• Not very interested unless I am doing the sport I like</li> <li>• I'm not good at sports</li> <li>• I don't like participating much because I'm not interested. It doesn't motivate me very well</li> <li>• At least one extra-curricular activity is compulsory, but cultural options are available. Up until year 11 Physical Education is compulsory once a week – I didn't enjoy it and would have preferred not to have partaken.</li> </ul>

Clearly, there was a mixed response about compulsory participation in sporting activities; some respondents were happy about it, while others were not so positive. However, it can be noted that compulsory participation in sports could make some young women feel even more uncomfortable in a situation that they already have negative feelings about.

*How participants feel about Muslim women's participation in sport in general:*

The following is a list of actual responses related to the research participants' feelings about sport in general:

Positive	Negative or indifferent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would love if there were more hijab friendly sports</li> <li>• Great as I like sport very much</li> <li>• No problem. It's healthy for the body</li> <li>• I'm ok with it since I'm so into sport ☺</li> <li>• I don't really mind participation in sports because it is for my own benefit (health)</li> <li>• I love to participate because it gives me an opportunity to exercise and become fit</li> <li>• [Many women in the Mackay region] take part in sports or have in the past</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not comfortable coz of my body is quite big</li> </ul>

Interestingly, some research participants provided responses that, while superficially indicating that they might hold negative views of sports, actually connoted that there were certain barriers preventing them from participating, and that participation was something they would otherwise perceive as a very positive action. Examples of these types of responses are as follows:

- Those who are in high school have greater opportunities to try out different sports provided by the schools;
- Older women do not feel confident enough to go to the gym even if it is a female only gym;
- There are not enough female referees and Muslim women cannot have any physical contact with males;
- Some sporting uniforms are not appropriate e.g. Dance outfits, swimming costumes, netball uniform etc;
- [Young Muslim women feel they] cannot participate in competitive sports due to reasons such as having males as spectators, male referees, and environment with no privacy;
- There are no female only sporting facilities e.g. swimming pools.
- Very limited female-only gym facilities;
- [Young Muslim women feel that they] need to keep fit.

As can be seen from the above table and supplementary list, although most respondents had positive feelings towards and about sporting activities, some respondents held concerns about certain issues related to the delivery of such activities. These concerns included: a general dislike of sports; not being personally comfortable or confident participating in such activities; inappropriate uniforms; and there being a lack of women's-only facilities. These issues are discussed in more detail in the following section, on 'barriers that limit young Muslim women's participation in sports and recreation'.

### *3. Identify barriers and factors that limit Muslim young women's participation in sports and recreation at family and community levels;*

Responses to this aim were varied, but can be grouped into several major sections including (but not limited to): high cost (either for memberships, fees etc or for clothing, transport or hiring personal instructors); mixed gender (either through teams, or having to participate with male spectators or instructors); lack of availability of transport; lack of a suitable venue (including the lack of appropriate facilities at the venue e.g. prayer room). Significantly, it was revealed that for some participants there was some contestation between their Islamic beliefs and their cultural background or identity. In other cases, some women stated that they did not feel comfortable participating in sporting activities, whether that was because some women did not like sports, or because of other factors, such as discrimination or lack of support. Indeed, issues mentioned earlier in relation to the

high cost involved in participation in sporting activities, also stand alone as barriers. A prime example of this is the lack of availability of transport, or the high cost of it where it is available. From the examination of these factors, it can also be seen that these issues are all intertwined, i.e. the need for Islamic clothing, gender segregated sessions, transport and cost.

Interestingly, recent studies conducted by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) and the Ethnic Youth Issues Network (EYIN) revealed that in general, young people from non-English speaking backgrounds in Australia do not participate in sporting activities as frequently or at as high a rate as their Anglo-Australian counterparts. However, according to EYIN's 1998 report "a high percentage of young people from ethnic communities participate in sport through school or on a social basis", indicating that many are not engaging with organised sport or sporting facilities or that these facilities are not adequately engaging them. Importantly, this indicates a general need for extant sporting facilities and clubs to evaluate their own practices and procedures to discover the ways they can accommodate the needs of more non-Anglo young people in their activities and clubs. Indeed, this suggestion also forms part of one of the strategies of this report.

The following is a comprehensive account of the factors that young Muslim women participating in our research perceived as barriers to their participation in sporting activities. It should be noted that many of these factors, as listed below, are artificially separated here for ease of comprehension – many of them are interrelated and should be considered as clusters of factors rather than a single unit.

#### *No Barriers*

A few respondents indicated that they believed there were no barriers to them participating in sport. Although it is unclear whether or not they were referring to personalised barriers, or societal barriers, these respondents often later indicated 'conditions' related to there being no barriers, probably demonstrating that it was a combination of the former and the latter. For example, when asked to describe whether there were barriers restricting young Muslim women's participation in sports, one respondent claimed that there were, "none, but [that she] would think of joining a sporting club if provided with Islamic sporting wear". Similarly, another respondent stated that there were "no barriers", although she later said that current suitable sporting venues were far from home and often allowed men into the facilities.

#### *Venues*

Many respondents cited inappropriate venues being a major barrier to young Muslim women's participation in sporting activities. The most significant factor here was that there was a lack of women's-only venues (so commonly cited as a barrier that it is included in its own section, page 21). As stated by one respondent, there was "a lack of women only sporting venues ... [and her] parents don't want [her] ... around guys because [she's] ... a girl". Another respondent presented a similar case, saying "Indoor sports provide privacy for people. Outdoor areas are not suitable for Muslim women as there is no privacy from males, even if they are spectators." These statements, despite both being related to venue, also tie in with other factors that limit or prevent young Muslim women's participation in sport.

Further examples of these other issues that were linked to venue indicate that there was a need for prayer rooms and/or a break for specific prayer times. Childcare facilities at the sporting venues were also a high priority, with many women indicating that if the extant sporting venues were more family-friendly, parents would be ensured of girls' safety, transport issues may be alleviated (because mothers could also spend time at the facility and not merely have to drop off and pick up their children) and that more young women would have a greater chance to take part.

Some respondents indicated that there should be more sporting facilities that were closer to where they lived, thereby also eliminating transport woes. And on a slightly different note, one respondent claimed "We should not have music in sporting facilities organised by Muslims".

Clearly, there is a multitude of issues related to the provision of a suitable venue for young Muslim women to take part in sporting and fitness related activities. Fortunately, many of them seem to be

factors which can be readily tended to in order to encourage this to take place.

### *Clothing*

Many research participants indicated that clothing was an issue influencing their decision or otherwise to play sport or to be involved in a physical activity for the purposes to maintaining their health. Much of the clothing considered appropriate for and by Muslim women to wear (sometimes layers of clothing) not only physically restricted the women's movements, but also sometimes had the potential of leading to overheating. Indeed, one respondent indicated that there were no barriers but for the lack of availability of Islamic sporting wear. YANQ's interview with Islamic sporting wear company Ahiida provided similar insight; in fact the company was established to suit the sporting needs of the founder's niece and her friends, who seemed physically restrained while playing netball. Ahiida's clothing is available in a range of designs, specifically engineered not to cling to the body when wet, and is loose enough to maintain the sense of modesty that many Muslim women desire. However, while some young Muslim women know about Ahiida's range, and others, some feel that the specially designed Islamic sporting wear is too expensive to obtain. Further, the fact that sporting organisations have uniform codes dictating what women who are part of a team should wear also influences Muslim women's decision to participate in sport. Team uniforms are often inappropriate and lack the level of modesty desired by many Muslim women and their families, or are unwavering in their restrictions for adaptations to the uniforms to be allowed. One respondent exemplified this by saying, "Some sports like netball have become more sexualized through the uniforms - participation not encouraged by the Muslim community unless an alternative uniform can be negotiated."

Non segregated areas (based on gender) also made things difficult, with respondents claiming that because males were present, they had no choice but to "cover up" and risk overheating or be forced not to participate because of it. Examples of responses are as follows:

- There are barriers that prevent my child ... in playing sport for example the lack of sporting wear and I don't mind her playing sport if her school has sport for the high school children. I don't mind if she does because I want her to stay fit and healthy.
- Mostly low confidence and religion in relation to the fact of over heating because of the clothings I have to wear to cover my body from head to toe
- I can't join a club for soccer because of the lack of Islamic sporting wear.
- Having non segregated areas to play sport makes it very difficult to play with the hijab on - gets very hot

### *Lack of interest in sports*

A general lack of interest in sports by some research participants was a factor preventing their participation. Forced participation (i.e. at schools) proved unbeneficial, instead reinforcing an atmosphere that lacked comfort, stripped motivation and that was not fun. Respondents stated their desires for having their group of friends participate together in a fun, welcoming atmosphere, in a sport that was itself deemed 'fun' by its participants. Some young women said they lacked the confidence to take part, whether due to body image, or other factors. For example, one respondent said, "Having only fit skinny people there would make me feel embarrassed and I wouldn't like it". Others maintained that their lack of motivation and energy was a barrier: "Chronic laziness!" was the response of one participant. Whether facetious or not, this response and others like it show that even if all external barriers in society were addressed, there would still remain internalised factors like this one that would limit young Muslim women's participation in sports. This only reinforces the fact that while Australia has the reputation for being a sporting nation, this itself is a stereotype and fails to accommodate to the needs and desires of many individuals in Australia who are not drawn to sporting activities. In addition, while some indicated that they personally held the desire to play sports, their friends did not, and so this either limited the amount of people who could form a team (i.e. to enable competition or formal sporting events) or reduced the amount of fun that could be seen to be related to the activity by the young women who wanted to play.

### *The gender factor:*

Gender related factors were cited by many research participants, from the presence of male spectators, to there being mixed teams, to there being not enough female coaches or referees. This was a significant issue and, like other issues that were named as barriers to young Muslim women's participation in sports, this was not a stand alone issue, but was intertwined with other factors. For example, if men were likely to be present at a sporting venue (even on a "sneak-in" basis), many women felt it necessary to wear long, loose clothing, if not also the *hijab*. This led to limitations in the types of activities women felt comfortable in participating in, even in designated women's only venues. "I have to cover up just in case a boy sneaks in, and because I'm all covered, I'm physically limited in what I can do, both in the sense that I might overheat, and in the sense that my clothes will restrict my movement." Indeed, the gender issue generally fell into two categories, as listed below: 1) the lack of female trainers, referees and coaches, and 2) the presence (regardless of legitimacy) of males.

#### 1) Female Trainers, referees, coaches etc.

According to many respondents, there is a lack of female instructors, coaches, referees and trainers, making things very difficult in relation to gendered segregation of sports. For example, there would be no benefit in organising women's only sporting teams and venues, if there were no female adjudicators to run the competition or sessions, meaning also that those young Muslim women who wanted to participate could not reach their full potential.

#### 2) The presence of males

The presence of males in general led to many other issues, including the restriction of women to wear modest clothing that covered much of their bodies; clothing that was not conducive to the ease and range of movement necessary for participation in sporting activities, and that could also lead to immediate health risks such as overheating. Indeed, any mixed gender setting was deemed inappropriate by a large number of respondents, and therefore mixed teams were definitely not a suitable option. Comments demonstrating this issue are as follows (note: these are actual responses):

- Indoor sports provide privacy for people. Outdoor areas are not suitable for Muslim women as there is no privacy from males even if they are spectators.
- Eg. Martial arts- there will be greater participation if there were no males present i.e. Female only class/group with a female instructor.
- Lack of women-only sporting venues, Lack of training for women who were not able to participate in sports previously. Parents strict about boys, going out
- Lack of women only sporting venues
- Strictly women only spaces, where I can comfortably dress in sporting wear (i.e. without the hijab).
- I don't feel comfortable taking part in sports activities as there is no [gendered] segregation
- Having non segregated areas to play sport makes it very difficult to play with the hijab on - gets very hot

#### *Cost*

The high costs involved in participating in sporting activities was a definite barrier, indicated by the high number of respondents listing price, fees, and cost related issues. Some families are large and cannot afford to send all the children to sporting activities because of the range of expenses involved. The cost of uniforms, or Islamic clothing, membership fees, registration, transport and insurance – and the combined cost of these things – meant that even if the desire and familial approval to play sport existed, the high financial outlay in doing so acted as a limiting factor. Indeed, this also applied to other factors such as the idea that a group could hire out a facility for a fixed period in order to ensure the space and time was for women only, and also meant that the idea that a personal trainer could attend an individual's home for specific training sessions was also out of reach for many Muslim families.

#### *Transport*

As mentioned above, cost of transport was a barrier to Muslim women's participation in sport. Even if transport existed and was affordable, the time taken to travel to a suitable sporting venue may mean that very little time remained available in an individual's schedule to actually participate in sport,

given the other restrictions on the participant's time (e.g. prayer times, familial obligations, school). This was particularly a limiting factor if venues were far away from where the person lived, worked, or studied, and was further exacerbated by parental concerns for safety for the safety of their daughters after dark. For young Muslim women who relied on their parents to drive them to and from sporting venues, parents' schedules also played a role. Indeed, as one respondent said, "Transportation [is a] huge issue. We used to play soccer in a girls-only space but it was too far for many girls and the number dwindled eventually they had to cancel the whole thing, for many young people transport is a huge issue."

### *Lack of Support*

Many respondents indicated that there was a general lack of support for young Muslim women to participate in sporting activities. This came in several forms, but for the sake of comprehension, can be addressed as lack of cross cultural awareness in venues, organisations, and in the wider community. This resulted in a generally unpleasant atmosphere. Not only were things like clothing and lack of understanding and respect for Muslim women's clothing choices (mentioned earlier in this report) a barrier for many women, it was evident that a lack of knowledge about prayer times and practices meant that some women were unable to participate in sporting classes or schedules. Further, even extant women's only facilities that might otherwise be ideal still had limitations on the level of support and understanding available. For example, inappropriate music, or lack of air conditioning could adversely influence a Muslim woman's decision to participate in sport due to either sensibilities or beliefs, or the dangers it presented to the women's physical well being. Even the uniform of some sporting clubs and teams and/or the unavailability of adaptations to the uniform (i.e. to result in a more modest outfit) were issues here.

Similarly, many respondents commented on the generally unsupportive atmosphere of many venues, organisations, or teams relating to Muslim women's involvement. This is seen both in the attitudes of other attendees, and in the general environment and/or 'feeling' of the venue. Bad comments, pressure to perform, bullies, an atmosphere of elitism or being seen as outcast and not being included were all issues mentioned by respondents. As exemplified by respondents (note: the following are actual responses by research participants):

- "People who don't show sportsmanship and show negative behaviour that distracts the people who are looking forward in playing sport"
- "Mostly the lack of understanding and respect of our traditional Islamic headscarf and the lack of women-only sporting venues... Even some women-only sporting venues have men lurking around for some reason or another"
- "I find the environment provided for Muslim women only caters for those Muslim ladies who are talented in sports and doesn't allow others to being that talent."

### *Time*

Some research participants argued that when suitable sporting activities are scheduled, they are not conducted at a suitable time, especially if the woman has children, or needs to attend university or school classes. Additionally, some women showed concern about fitting sport in to an already busy schedule. "Time is ... an issue" said one focus group respondent. "Kids are busy these days, even on weekends. They have school, homework, watch a bit of TV and other things and sport... They need to relax". Timing therefore is an issue that could influence young Muslim women's participation in sport, even if appropriate venues and clothing are available. For this reason, 'timing' features in the suggestions for further research at the close of this report (page 29).

### *Parents and family*

Younger respondents in particular stated that their decision to participate in sport rested largely with their parents, or at least was based on their parents' general approval or otherwise of a particular sporting activity. The following are examples of comments by respondents:

- Parents disapproval
- Need to be safe
- Aunt disapproval

- Family (parents) when involving boys
- Family (no other details given here)
- My mum and dad are always working and I can't go by myself

However, one parent who took part in the research said that while “There are barriers that prevent my child ... in playing sport, for example the lack of sporting wear ... I don't mind her playing sport if her school has sport for the high school children. I don't mind if she does because I want her to stay fit and healthy.”

#### *Cultural vs. Religious restrictions*

Because some more conservative families contest Islam's promotion of health and fitness on the basis of cultural influence, thereby affecting the clarity surrounding women's participation in such activities, pressure is placed on some young Muslim women to conform to what is often differing beliefs from familial contingents and wider Muslim communities. Often it is the older family members who comment on the connotations or morality of women participating in sport; and this may potentially indicate an intergenerational conflict of ideas rather than a cultural and religious contestation. However, this issue is exemplified in the statement of one of the focus group participants, “I played sport as a girl. But I think people's cultural backgrounds come with restrictions on what they (girls) cannot do, which is actually completely permitted in Islam. Like my daughter's grandmother (who is Bosnian) was so shocked that she was learning to ride a bike.” Similarly, other respondents claimed that while Islam not only permitted but encouraged women to maintain their health and fitness through exercise, they personally perceived that some sports (such as netball or team swimming or gymnastics) have become sexualised through their use of revealing, short or tight uniforms. As one respondent mentioned, “participating in sports is not encouraged by the Muslim community unless an alternative uniform can be negotiated.”

Several respondents stated that religion was a barrier to their participation in sport, but provided no other explanation as to how this was so. One respondent said of the barriers, “Religious belief. I don't feel comfortable taking part in sports activities as there is no segregation”, which indicates that other issues, such as appropriate behaviour in mixed gender surroundings were the focus of the religious belief rather than sport and physical activity being looked down upon by the religious order itself. Similarly, as another respondent said of the barriers, “religion in relation to the fact of over heating because of the clothings (sic) I have to wear to cover my body from head to toe”, modest dressing, especially in mixed gender settings was the main factor, rather than any adverse Islamic belief about sporting activities.

#### *4. Develop recommendations and strategies for key stakeholders involved in the planning and delivery of sports and recreational activities that provide practical solutions to addressing the needs of Muslim young women;*

The following two sections (responding to aims four and five of the project) include suggestions by the research participants themselves on the potential for strategies to increase young Muslim women's participation in sport, as well as a special note on Islamic sporting wear. These suggestions include (but are not limited to): appropriate venues that are private, close by, and affordable; appropriate, loose and modest clothing; the availability of childcare; that the sport should be fun, and among friends; and that there should be more female instructors. Comments in these sections are divided under similar headings. Not surprisingly, many of these strategies stem from the barriers listed in the previous section.

Note, section four generally describes the societal or official organisations or clubs influences on young women's participation, while section five primarily lists the more personal factors influencing women's choices to take part in sporting and fitness related activities or not.

#### *Venues*

Many respondents cited venue as a major influencing factor when choosing whether to participate in sports. The most common factors relating to venue were location, cost, transport and privacy.

Secondary concerns were prayer room, or at least having breaks for prayer times, and the availability of childcare. Often mentioned as a separate concern, but included here because of its relation to accessibility of venues (location wise) is transport. To combat these barriers, research participants suggested that sporting venues could be hired out for the day, or for just a couple of hours a week for women's-only time, without allowing men inside as either instructors or spectators. This latter option however is likely to be the hardest to implement, particularly if the venue is allocating women's-only time free of charge (i.e. no specific venue hire charges), due to anti-discrimination laws and for commercial reasons, but could nonetheless be accomplished. Other respondents suggested that having women's only sporting activities at schools after school hours would not only allow for less expensive venue hire costs (which could probably be waived altogether at a school), but would also enable participants to catch the school bus home. In addition, some respondents mentioned that air-conditioned facilities were necessary (so as to allow women who wear layers of clothing or clothing not made specifically for sporting activities not to overheat), and that no music, or at least music that was deemed inoffensive by Muslim women be played in these venues. Despite these suggestions however, the essential elements remained: a venue with "good privacy, a [closed] place where there's not [many] people around".

The following is a venue-related list of strategies that could be implemented to increase or encourage young Muslim women's participation in sports:

1. Hire venues for a specific period so that it would be a totally women's-only space;
2. Lobby venues to allocate certain times to be women's-only times (although this might be a problem for male instructors and staff, if not male spectators);
3. Subsidised or less expensive joining and/or membership fees for extant women's only facilities;
4. Provide transport to and from the venue (if not from home, then from major key locations that are accessible to many i.e. shopping centres, transit centres etc);
5. Ideal venue facilities should incorporate prayer rooms (or the organizers should at least provide breaks from prayer times. This is also something that appears in the section regarding cultural competence training for sporting venues/organisations see page 25).
6. Provide childcare facilities (this may be as simple as providing a room allocated to childcare, and volunteers amongst the Muslim community could care for and supervise the children during this period);
7. Organise team sports that do not depend on mixed gender teams.

"If there were more women only facilities. There are many women only gyms, but this can become expensive. If the public swimming pools had maybe one women's-only day (or even just a few hours in the morning) each fortnight, I think this would be very popular." *Survey respondent.*

### *Clothing*

The issue of clothing raises several related factors. Firstly, in relation to sports uniforms. These should be adapted, or at least be allowed acceptable modifications so as to incorporate the sensibilities of young Muslim women and their families. For example, longer, looser clothing should be available in team colours, rather than having the only option as a short, pleated netball skirt as is often incorporated into many girls' sporting uniforms. Secondly, specially designed Islamic sporting wear (which doesn't cling to the body when wet, and allows the wearer's body temperature to remain relatively cool even when exercising) should be provided at no cost or for a subsidised fee to groups of young Muslim women who choose to participate in sporting activities. While initially, this option seems like an enormous task, the viability of a clothing subsidy or cost-free provision of Islamic sportswear to young Muslim women is an issue that needs to be explored, especially given the relatively thorough perception of such a need. As one young respondent said, "[I need to] wear something long that mum would like", while another said, "[we need] simple outfits (not huge dresses (which are embarrassing) because I am Muslim girl. I can't wear short clothes and some sports clothes which don't fit with my religion make appropriate uniforms for various sports".

Indeed, when asked specifically about Islamic sporting wear, respondents indicated overwhelmingly that it would make a positive influence on their decision to play sport or participate in physical activities. Only two respondents said that having access to Islamic sporting wear would not influence

their decision to participate in sport. A few respondents mentioned other concerns, such as affordability of sporting wear, and whether the venue provided access to childcare or had courses/events scheduled at a time around the respondent's university timetable. Others suggested that the venue, club or organization could hold the sporting wear and hire or lend it out to Muslim women and others who felt more comfortable wearing the looser clothing.

The following comments, taken directly from survey results, show an insight into the responses to the question, "If you were provided with Islamic sporting wear, would you be inclined to participate in sports?"

- Yes, I do think my child could join a sporting if that is so;
- Yes, a chance I would...just need to get information about it to make a decision;
- I would definitely consider it, as long as I could fit it around my uni timetable.
- DEFINITELY! I am dying to!
- I wouldn't have to think I'd be in it before you could count to 3;
- If it's at reasonable cost. Sporting wear couldn't be a big problem;
- Sure would (if they also had childcare).

Therefore, it is a suggested strategy that Islamic sporting wear (like that pictured, below) be incorporated into the resources of various sporting facilities, and/or that Islamic sporting wear companies provide subsidized uniforms or clothing to Islamic female sporting teams.



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#### *Greater acceptance of Islamic dress*

Also related to the above two recommendations is the greater acceptance by people in the wider community of Muslim women's choice to wear clothing that by general western standards is relatively modest. Understanding and respect for some Muslim women's right to wear loose fitting, longer clothing, including the *hijab* should reinforce the supportive environment conducive to the fun and encouraging atmosphere mentioned in the previous recommendation.

#### *Cross cultural awareness training*

Cross cultural awareness training should be delivered to various sporting venues and organisations, specifically in relation to the Islam and the customs and beliefs that influence Muslim women. At minimum, this should increase the level of support and understanding for the needs of young Muslim women in such venues, and should be done with the ultimate aim being that the venues make independent decisions to allocate specific times for women's only activities that would benefit not only Muslim women but many other non-Muslim women in the wider community. One respondent exemplified this need, stating that there needs to be "Understanding and respect and the freedom to either wear what we like while participating, or keeping it a strictly female only atmosphere." Indeed, this contention highlights other important issues, as follows.

#### *Gender separation*

Certain sporting venues and classes at various but regular times should be available for female-only access, including the restriction and removal of male employees and spectators throughout these periods. Female only sporting teams and competitions should be organised. Indeed, one respondent stated, "When I was in England almost all swimming pools had at least some female only sessions. Venues could provide time slots during the week where women can come to participate." The similarity of other comments indicates that the capacity for female only spaces and times is extant and need only be nurtured, rather than created.

#### *Female Trainers, referees, coaches etc.*

One area that should be made more available to young Muslim women is better access to female trainers, instructors, coaches, and referees. Specifically, respondents contended that there was a desire for female instructors who showed particular interest in wanting to increase every individual's motivation and interest in participating in sport. The positive demeanour of individual coaches should be conducive to this.

#### *Home based*

Because home based activities were featured throughout many responses to the surveys and in the focus groups, it is a recommendation of this report that there not only be external facilities hired for the specific purposes of encouraging young Muslim women to participate in sport, but also that home based physical activities are encouraged. To enable this to occur, it is suggested that people hire a private trainer, to come into the home and coach people individually. While the initial cost of this endeavour will be high, the cost could be divided amongst several women, who take turns hosting the trainer and some female friends at their home. Initiatives such as this would not only largely eliminate transport issues, but also the issue of privacy and gender segregation, because the home environment is small enough to be totally controlled by the participants. The informal provision of childcare would also be far more easily provided in the home environment. Obviously, it would be unlikely that large scale team sports could be undertaken on this basis, but the training would be targeted specifically at the goals of the individual women and huge physical health and social benefits could result. To assist with this recommendation it is suggested that information packs be assembled, detailing lists of qualified, female trainers in all regions who would be willing to provide their services as per the needs of the Muslim women in question, and the approximate costs of training. In addition, subsidies should be sought for groups of Muslim women choosing to exercise in this way. A secondary objective should be to assemble information kits or conduct information sessions for Muslim women about the benefits of exercising in the home and the correct methods for doing so. This would enable women to create their own exercise programs and for them to do so in a safe way, while still being able to check back with their trainer and/or peers at regular intervals.

#### *Transport*

Transport needs to be made available in order to make it easier for young Muslim women and their female relatives to attend sporting functions. Where transport is available, it should be subsidised or free of charge. While car pooling registers can be established within the communities themselves, funding could be sought to help offset the cost of hiring buses for this purpose. Some community organisations, or the local council services might be willing to assist in this regard.

#### *Cost*

In general, the cost of participation in sport is very high. Subsidies are required to offset the high outlay of funds that presents an obstacle for young Muslim women and others to participate in sporting activities. In particular, these subsidies should be related to venue hire, the provision of sporting wear, childcare and transport. Some facets of Muslim communities may be able to lobby (or have people lobby on their behalf) extant women's-only facilities for free access to the gym, and lower fees to other facilities, based on the special needs of some of the community members as new migrants or refugees who have not yet been able to gain employment.

### *5. Explore culturally responsive and inclusive delivery of sports and recreational activities for Muslim young women in Queensland.*

#### *Fun, positive, supportive and encouraging atmosphere*

Because a portion of respondents indicated that their own dislike of sports prevented their participation in such activities (coupled with others' contention that they were particularly unmotivated to participate in sports that were boring or from which their friendship groups were absent), these issues should be addressed. To do so, sporting activities and their promotion need to be

presented in fun, positive, supportive, and encouraging ways. As one respondent said, for her to engage in fitness related activities, it “needs to be a sport I enjoy, and with my friends”. Likewise, another respondent said that the activities should be “social activities, not forced, and with similar age groups [where we can] meet new people and make friends”.

The need for greater positivity, sportsmanship and understanding was also articulated by research participants. Further influencing this is the fact that some respondents said that discrimination was a factor that also needs to be eliminated in order to encourage greater participation of young women in sporting activities, something that is addressed in great detail in the barriers section of this report, and in the recommendation that venues and organisations engage in cross cultural training.

#### *Time*

Times for sporting classes and events should be varied and regular (both morning and afternoon), so as to allow a wide range of women access to these. For example, university and school timetables should be considered, and sporting activities should be scheduled around or incorporated within school timetables. For young Muslim women and their families who are not involved in school or university activities, other issues, such as childcare, transport (which some may consider to be unsuitable after dark, for example) should be considered. It is therefore a recommendation that the specificities of these factors be researched as part of this strategy.

In addition, young Muslim women, if provided with these options, should also be encouraged to take the initiative themselves in making sporting activities a priority in their schedules for the sake of their health.

#### *Parents*

Parental approval for young Muslim women to participate in sport is paramount to the removal of family influenced barriers for such participation. It has become evident that some parents worry about the safety of their children and are dubious about the suitability of sporting activities for their daughters. Therefore, several issues should be addressed. Firstly, parents of young Muslim women should be made aware of the safety precautions set in place both in and around the sporting venues and in relation to transport pick up and drop off points. They should also be made aware of the safety of their daughters while actually participating in sporting events. Certainly though, these things should be assured and set in place before such an education process can be initiated. In addition, a significant portion of the parents’ value sets undoubtedly arise from cultural beliefs, and may also present a generational belief set. Assistance can be given to the family unit of those families who have multicultural identities in the form of reassurance that multifaceted identities and behaviours are acceptable. This may assist some families as a whole to be more open minded about what may be specific cultural beliefs that deny there are benefits of young Muslim women participating in sport.

In practical terms, this could mean a community-based and generated campaign to encourage young women to participate in sporting and fitness related activities through the promotion of the health benefits obtained therein; a campaign which should involve as many facets of the Muslim communities as possible, potentially including: Islamic leaders, Imams, community groups, Al-Nisa Youth Group Inc and the Islamic Women’s Association of Queensland (IWAQ).

#### *A focus on keeping fit*

Many research participants stated that a focus on women’s health and the benefits of keeping fit would encourage more young Muslim women to participate in sporting activities. Health and fitness education campaigns could be initiated and supported, and put together in a blithe enough manner that young Muslim women themselves would be encouraged and motivated to stay fit. Many respondents contended that Islam encourages women to stay fit and healthy. Issues of confidence, motivation and self esteem also arose, with some young women mentioning that their lack of participation was like a “catch 22”; lack of confidence leading to non-participation in sport which leads to further lack of confidence because they remain unskilled in such activities.

### *Form young women's state wide network*

A state wide network of young women should be formed to drive the initiatives and the implementation of the recommendations of this report; this factor in itself being a recommendation. It will be necessary to engage young women in different urban and regional centres to push these implementations so that women living in all areas of Queensland, not just the southeast can benefit from these strategies. In effect, these will be action groups. By creating a committee of women of all backgrounds and discussing with them the needs for bettering the venues, sports and sporting gear, this should benefit a large number of women in society, Muslim and non-Muslim alike and, due to the wider population base this will establish, this should ensure that some of the strategies will be more viable to implement.

It is suggested that in the early stages of the formation of this network that members of the original reference group for this project (Al-Nisa Youth Group Inc, Faiza El-Higzi, YANQ's Multicultural Development Officer and representatives from the University of Queensland and the Department of Sport and Recreation) join together with other community representatives and interested parties across Queensland in order to discuss the logistics of the implementation of the other strategies. In addition, 'champions' who can drive these actions should be selected from amongst this wider group and final responsibility for the network will rest with them and any subsequent members rather than with members of the original reference group.



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## Suggestions for Further Research

### *Suggestions for Further Research*

1. Research should be undertaken into the specific needs of young Muslim women in each region of Queensland, as to what sport/s in particular is/are favoured amongst certain age groups, and what times would be the best and most suitable for them. This will enable greater clarity in planning for particular sporting events and venues (i.e. Younger Muslim women who prefer soccer (for example) may be accommodated through school based facilities in a particular region).
2. Research should be undertaken into the personalised rather than societal factors that limit young Muslim women's participation in sport. This will enable a dual pronged approach which should encourage greater participation in sporting activities by young Muslim women (i.e. If women's only venues are provided, along with transport and Islamic sporting wear, what other factors (e.g. timing, personal schedule or motivation) influence a woman's personal decision not to play sport?).
3. Research should be undertaken into whether it is a localised Queensland phenomenon that as young Muslim women get older their willingness to participate in or be spectators of sporting activities lessens (i.e. Does this differ in regions of Victoria and NSW, and if so, why?) In examining both the racial/ethno-religious level of support and the formal infrastructures of sporting organisations and facilities in particular areas as part of this research, this should result in a clearer understanding of this finding.



## Recommendations

For more details on these recommendations see in particular, aims four and five of the results:

1. *Venue hire*  
E.g. Groups of young Muslim women or groups acting on their behalf can hire particular venues for specific periods to be strictly women's-only spaces.
2. *Approach current venues*  
E.g. Approach current venues to provide a women's-only space and time for sporting activities. Approach extant women's-only facilities, such as Fernwood Women's Health Clubs, to subsidise membership for new and emerging groups of Muslim women, and ensure that at least for certain times, the entire facility remains a men-free space (i.e. No male trainers, cleaners or 'walk-ins' present).
3. *School facilities*  
E.g. Form agreements with schools and other educational institutions to use, hire or subsidised hire of their sporting facilities for women's-only sporting activities at set times outside of school hours. This is for use by all Muslim women, not just those who are currently enrolled at that educational institution.
4. *Home-based sporting activities*  
E.g. Explore options to promote and support sporting activities within the home environment (eg. Home based trainers/classes, exercise programs, videos).
5. *Transport*  
E.g. Transport to and from sporting venues can be provided where it currently does not exist, and subsidised where it exists but is too expensive.
6. *Expense*  
E.g. Cost of participation in sporting activities (eg. Gym membership, transport, fees, access to trainers, Islamic sporting wear) can be subsidised or, in the case of Islamic sporting wear could be provided on site. This can be on a daily/hourly hire rate.
7. *Safety*  
E.g. Ensure and reinforce the safety of young Muslim women while participating in sporting activities, and educate parents and communities as to these safety steps in place.
8. *Childcare*  
E.g. Improve standards and availability of childcare. For example, childcare can be provided on site (at a subsidised rate) so as to alleviate pressures on time for young Muslim women who are mothers, or so that their family members can be on site with them.
9. *Culturally appropriate training*  
E.g. This is particularly applicable to full day organised events, an example of which could be the provision of prayer breaks at specific times, or the provision of prayer rooms. In addition, culturally appropriate training for extant women's-only venues and others can eliminate the limitations associated with having male trainers or cleaners present in otherwise women's-only facilities, as well as increase acceptance of Islamic sporting wear, therefore creating and reinforcing an encompassing, supportive environment overall.
10. *Women's only spaces*  
E.g. Educate wider community and specific venues and organisations the importance of women's-only spaces.
11. *Muslim women PE teachers*  
E.g. Encourage Muslim women to become PE teachers, trainers, referees etc, and create a

support base and network to strengthen this.

12. *Sporting wear*

E.g. Make steps towards making Islamic sporting wear available to young Muslim women and others at a subsidised rate, or on a daily hire basis.

13. *Network*

E.g. Create a network of young Muslim women delegates and other key stakeholders across Queensland for the purposes of driving and implementing the above recommendations. Strategies should be formed that implement multiple options at once as listed above, and action groups should be established in each region of the state to maintain these movements.



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## Addendum

### Addendum

In late 2007, an action group was formed to implement the strategies of this report. The following extract is taken from a Muslim Youth Services (MY Services) report written by Shaima Khan, Muslim Youth and Community Development Officer for MY Services, a division of Al-Nisa Youth Group Inc:

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Over the December 2007 - January 2008 School holidays, Muslim Youth Services (MYServices) held sporting activities for young Muslim women in the Brisbane region. Two ice-skating activities and a swimming activity were conducted. The first ice-skating activity was organised in partnership with *Al-Nisa' Youth Group Inc*, the managing team of MYServices\*.

The activities were advertised in a number of ways. A flyer with the events' details was electronically circulated through MYServices and Al-Nisa's databases and personal networks. The events were also advertised in the Muslim community online weekly newsletter, *Crescents Community News*. 100 flyers (which cost \$80 to print) were left at local mosques' stands, given to a number of people to distribute and were handed out to young women who attend weekend classes at Kuraby Masjid (mosque). When asked how they heard of the events, most girls reported they heard about it from a friend, hence word of mouth showed to be most effective.

Girls were asked to register by calling in, and informing of their full name, age, contact details and whether or not they required assistance with transport. As a youth service, Al-Nisa/MYServices' public liability insurance does not cover minors under age 13, so a minimum age of 13 was advertised. Girls under 13 who really wished to participate (quite a few!) were required to be accompanied by their mothers/guardian.

#### Al-Nisa/MYServices Ice-Skating

About 21 registrations were received and 14 participants (13 youth and 1 adult) attended the first 3 hour ice-skating event, held on Christmas Eve at Ice World in Acacia Ridge. Participants ranged from ages 11-36, the average age being 15.

To assist those who required transport, a 12-seater bus had been booked to be borrowed from the Islamic Women's Association of Queensland (IWAQ). However as only 4 girls ended up requiring assistance with transport, it was decided to carpool instead. The girls who needed transport gathered at Kuraby Masjid, as it is a central location easily accessible by public transport. They were picked up and dropped off at the Kuraby Masjid, courtesy of Al-Nisa's Shameem Rane\*.

For most of the girls, it was their very first attempt at ice-skating. The girls had a ball, despite the bruises and blisters! By the end of the afternoon many of them were gracefully gliding on the rink. The girls were then treated to pizza and demanded at least another ice-skating event before the school holidays finish.

The girls were charged \$15 each, which included ice-skating and pizza.

### MYServices Girls Swimming

The design of the Springwood Sam Riley Pool naturally catered for the complete privacy Muslim women require when swimming. Sam Riley Pool also considerably ensured female staff on shift during the 3 hour swimming activity\*.

The MYServices Girls Swimming Activity on the 10th of January 2008 proved to be popular beyond expectation. Initially just 10 to 20 girls were expected to attend. However, 45 registrations were received, and just over 50 eager participants attended; which prompted exhausted Sam Riley staff member, Phoebe, to comment that she had 'never seen a group so energetic in a pool before!' The pool was almost full to capacity.

Of the 50 plus participants, 16 of them were clients of Multilink, a Logan-based refugee and migrant community service\*. As about 21 participants required assistance with transport, Multilink generously lent their bus and a driver. Again, the pick-up and drop-off point was Kuraby Masjid.

Although girls aged 13-25 were targeted, MYServices received innumerable requests outside the age bracket, as many Muslim women (ages 26+) have long waited for such an opportunity. The age limit hence was scrapped; however minors under 13 were required to attend with their mothers or guardians. Participants' ages ranged from 5-56, with the average age of 18.

As with the Ice-Skating activity, almost all participants reported that they learnt of the event by a friend, who heard about it from a friend! The popularity of swimming among both younger and older Muslim women was clearly highlighted, despite the fact that many of them could not swim, but were ever-so-keen to learn. The feedback from girls and women was extremely positive, with 100% of participants demanding that swimming should be held regularly, and that they would be happy to pay for regular sessions, since they had so much fun. The swimming activity was held free for participants, and the cost of \$145 for the three hours, was covered by MYServices.

It should be highlighted that *almost all* attendees live in the local area of the pool - suburbs

surrounding Springwood. This shows that the success of this swimming session just scrapped the surface of the Muslim women's demand of swimming activities! To give more Muslim women in Brisbane such opportunities, in the future MYServices hopes to coordinate such swimming activities, in partnership with pools in other localities across Brisbane.

### MYServices Ice-Skating II

The second ice-skating activity was organised following the success of the first. This time, the activity was scheduled for the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2008, just before school resumed. 25 registrations were received and 28 girls participated on the day. Most of the participants in the second ice-skating activity were away on holidays when the first ice-skating activity took place.

Once again, only four girls required assistance with transport, and the majority was either dropped off to the venue or used public transport. The ages ranged from 13-24, with the average age of 17.

### Al-Nisa/MYServices Bowling

Further, a bowling activity was organised but was cancelled due to a very small number of registrations, which indicated a lack of interest in the activity among young Muslim women.

### \*MYServices sincerely thanks:

- **Salma Mousali**, Al-Nisa' Youth Group; for her incomparable assistance in each of the activities
- **Shameem Rane**, Al-Nisa' Youth Group; for her assistance with transport on the Ice-Skating Activity
- **Vero Andriamasy**, Multilink; for her enthusiastic assistance with transport for the Swimming Activity
- **Phoebe & David**, Sam Riley Pool, Springwood; for being sensitive to the needs of Muslim women, and going the extra mile to make it such an enjoyable event for local Muslim women.