

## Building bridges – building understanding for Muslim students in social and learning environments

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This paper explores the development of resources for the increasing population of Muslim students within the Newcastle area, where the cultural and linguistic diversity of the population is quite narrow compared to the national population. Collaboration between the Newcastle Muslim Association, TAFE, Department of Education & Training, the Northern Settlement Services (formerly the Migrant Resource Centre) and the University has resulted in the development of a resource to give students and their families information about specialised services within the community so that they can quickly and easily make connections. The result of this collaboration has been the resource "Welcome to Newcastle: Information for Muslim students and families".

After the production of this resource, a smaller project team has continued to work together to produce a second resource in brochure style "Understanding Islam" and a third web based resource "Focusing on Islam: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions". Both of these resources aim to (1) assist the wider community to gain more information about Islam, (2) better understand Muslim beliefs and practices, (3) to dispel myths and (4) to encourage positive interactions in the workplace, classroom and the community generally.

The successful launch of these resources in November 2006, attended by more than 150 people representing local, regional and national organisations has inspired the project team to continue to work together in 2007. Two new projects are currently being developed – the first to assist academic staff from the School of Medicine to gain greater understanding of the needs of Muslim students in the learning environment and secondly the development of a guide for Muslim students to 'Understand Australia from a Muslim Perspective'.