

ASSYRIAN COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING IN FAIRFIELD CITY

GREG GOW

WITH

ASHUR ISAAC

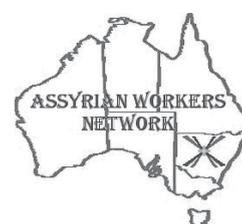
PAUL GORGEES

MARLIN BABAKHAN

KARDONIA DAAWOD

University of
Western Sydney

Bringing knowledge to life



© 2005 CENTRE FOR CULTURAL RESEARCH AND ASSYRIAN WORKERS' NETWORK

ISBN 1 74108 112 2

PUBLISHED BY THE CENTRE FOR CULTURAL RESEARCH,
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY

CENTRE FOR CULTURAL RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY
PARRAMATTA CAMPUS EBA
LOCKED BAG 1797
PENRITH SOUTH DC 1797
NSW AUSTRALIA
www.uws.edu.au/ccr

DESIGN: ANNA LAZAR, ODESIGN
PRINTING: UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY
COVER MODEL: JOSEPH SOLOMON

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	III
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
LIST OF ACRONYMS	VI
Introduction	1
1 Assyrians: a global community	3
2 Fairfield City: Australia's Assyrian centre	6
2.1 Perceptions of Fairfield	
2.2 Settlement history	
3 Statistical profile of the community	10
3.1 Population, origin and migration	
3.2 Family composition and age distribution	
3.3 Religious affiliations	
3.4 Language and education	
3.5 Labour force status	
3.6 Distribution by suburbs and tenure type	
4 Research approach	13
5 Assyrian organisations and community infrastructure	15
5.1 Organisations based in Fairfield City	
5.2 Churches: the hub of the community	
5.3 Building organisational partnerships	
6 Building social capital within families	21
6.1 Defining social capital	
6.2 Family life and social capital	
6.3 Family difficulties	
6.4 Intergenerational parent/child dynamics	
6.5 Fathers and young men	
6.6 Gender attitudes and domestic violence	
6.7 Trauma and mental health	
6.8 Financial problems	

Table of Contents

7	Young people	29
7.1	Youth perceptions of their community.	
7.1.1	Strengths	
7.1.2	Weaknesses	
7.2	Key Issues	
7.2.1	English language skills	
7.2.2	Safety and recreation	
7.2.3	Youth participation in Assyrian organisations	
8	Integrating mainstream, settlement and ethno-specific services	36
8.1	Capacity Building Forum feedback	
8.2	Barriers to mainstream service access	
8.2.1	Deficiency of Assyrian cultural expertise	
8.2.2	Preference for ethno-specific services	
8.2.3	Lack of integration between mainstream and ethno-specific services	
8.3	Steps to effective 'mainstreaming'	
8.4	The Assyrian Workers' Network	
9	Identity and cultural issues for service providers	42
9.1	Identity and difference	
9.2	Misrecognition and trauma	
10	Additional challenges and service gaps	45
10.1	Employment	
10.2	Health	
10.3	Information provision	
10.4	Housing	
10.5	English language skills, translating and interpreting services	
10.6	Seniors	
10.7	Education	
11	Recommendations	50
	Conclusion	55
	References	57

Executive Summary

This report relates community capacity building to the Assyrian community living in Fairfield City. It provides a snapshot of the community at a particular point in time and suggests directions for their future success. The report is the outcome of a twelve month project which surveyed the Assyrian community and mainstream service providers in the Fairfield area during 2004/05. It considers the broader Assyrian community, which includes new arrivals and those with a longer presence in Australia. The Assyrians currently constitute the second largest ethnic community within the Fairfield City Local Government Area (LGA) and lack equity in a range of key areas, including education, employment, housing and health.

There are four overarching themes running through the report. The first is that there needs to be a strengthening of the integration between settlement, mainstream, and ethno-specific service providers with shared Assyrian client-bases in Fairfield City. The second concerns the lack of knowledge about Assyrians—their language, culture and history. Many service providers simply do not know who Assyrians are and how best to deliver programs to them. The third concerns the need for a new culture of partnerships to develop among Assyrian organisations, which enables different groups to work together on shared problems. The fourth, is the importance of young people to the Assyrian community's future success.

The key issues impacting the community are described, along with the factors preventing it from moving ahead in terms of presenting a unified front to funding bodies and service providers. The discussion also highlights service gaps and recommends steps to service providers and government stakeholders for future capacity building.

The report begins by providing information about the Assyrians' immigration backgrounds, their lives in Fairfield City, and demographic profile with the LGA. The discussion then addresses three aspects of the Assyrian community: cultural and church organisations and their provision of community infrastructure and leadership; the significance of families for the building of social capital; and the perceptions and needs of Assyrian young people. Consideration is then given to service providers and the challenges of integrating mainstream, settlement and ethno-specific services. Identity and cultural issues for service providers are then explored, and service gaps documented. Following the main body of the report are a series of recommendations for capacity building both within the community and among service providers and government departments working with them.

About the Authors

Greg Gow is the lead author of this report, which he wrote while an Australian Research Council (ARC) Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Cultural Research (CCR), University of Western Sydney. He has published extensively on the cultural dimensions of refugee settlement in Australia. In October 2005, he commenced a position with the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS).

Ashur Isaac is a youth worker with twenty years experience developing and managing therapeutic programs for children and young people in a range of contexts. He currently works with the Assyrian Australian Association on community development and enhancing service delivery for Assyrian youth in Fairfield City.

Paul Gorgees studied at the University of Al-Mustansiriyah/Baghdad and worked with the UNHCR and the Red Cross in Northern Iraq before arriving in Australia in 1994. Then for five years he assisted asylum seekers with the Australian Red Cross. Since 2001 he has been employed as a Community Settlement Worker, and is now the Coordinator of the Assyrian Resource Centre located in Fairfield.

Marlin Babakhan studied social welfare at the University of Baghdad. She later practised as a counsellor in the Family Court (Iraq). In Australia she continued working in welfare services. Throughout the 1990s she worked with the Assyrian Australian Association, assisting newly arrived migrant and refugee populations who were settling in the Fairfield LGA. Since 2001, she has been a Multicultural Health Worker with Fairfield Multicultural Health Service.

Kardonia Daawod was born in Iraq and migrated to Australia in 1995. She is a qualified scientist and teacher who currently works in the Fairfield LGA as Health Education Officer with Karitane. Kardonia has extensive experience working with Assyrian families.

Acknowledgements

This report is in many ways a large collaborative effort. There are various people to thank, who assisted and supported us throughout the process of researching and writing.

Firstly, we wish to thank the University of Western Sydney (UWS) for funding the enterprise under their Regional and Community Engagement Grants Scheme. Kim Leever greatly assisted our application. Secondly, the partner organisations: the Assyrian Workers' Network (AWN) for their joint management of the project and unwavering support; the Assyrian Australian Association (AAA) for its generous in-kind support, and the Fairfield Multicultural Health Service. And the Fairfield MRC for their assistance with publishing costs.

Thanks also go to Armen Stephan who assisted the project's development and contributed through AWN meetings. Susan Homeh provided important administrative support and assistance to the project team. Alongside Susan, Agatha Florestino and Georgia Bililis from UWS collected data from various workshops and interviews. They provided the project with enthusiasm and support. We are also thankful to Anna Lazar for her excellent job preparing the report for printing and meeting tight deadlines.

Finally, we are indebted to a large number of Assyrian community members and workers from various services in the Fairfield area who made important contributions. To protect their privacy we generally do not use their names in the following sections.

List of Acronyms

- AAA** – Assyrian Australian Association
AANF – Assyrian Australian National Federation
ACL – Australian Centre for Languages
AFA – Assyrian Federation of Australia
AMEP – Adult Migrant English Program
ARC – Assyrian Resource Centre
CBD – Central Business District
CCR – Centre for Cultural Research (University of Western Sydney)
CRC – The New South Wales Community Relations Commission
CSSS – Community Settlement Services Scheme
DIMIA – Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
DoCS – The New South Wales Department of Community Services
FaCS – Department of Family and Community Services (Federal)
FICT – Families in Cultural Transition Program
IEC – Intensive English Centre
IHSS – Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy
LGA – Local Government Area
MRC – Migrant Resource Centre
NAATI – National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters
NAYSS – Newly Arrived Youth Support Services
NSW DET – New South Wales Department of Education and Training
PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SHP – Special Humanitarian Program
STARTTS – NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
SSWAHS – Sydney South West Area Health Service (formerly SWSAHS)
TAAAS – The Assyrian Australian Academic Society
TAFE – Technical and Further Education
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VET – Vocational Education and Training
UWS – University of Western Sydney

Introduction

Community capacity building is about enabling people to develop their individual and collective potential as contributing members of society. The verb 'building' highlights that it is a process which involves training, resourcing and supporting people. The aim is to develop the skills and capabilities of community members so they are better able to identify, and help meet, their needs. Ideally, service providers play the roles of facilitators and catalysts, who support community driven efforts to build capacity. In this way community capacity building is about multi-layered and integrated partnerships.

This report relates the community capacity building process to the Assyrian community in Fairfield City. It considers the broader Assyrian community, which includes new arrivals and those with a longer presence in Australia. The Assyrians currently constitute the second largest ethnic community within the Fairfield City Local Government Area (LGA) and lack equity in a range of key areas, including education, employment, housing and health.

Throughout the following pages the label 'Assyrians' refers to Syriac-speaking Christians who have traditionally identified with the Assyrian Church of the East, Ancient Church of the East, Syriac-Orthodox, Syriac-Catholic, and Chaldean Catholic denominational groups. In Fairfield City the overwhelming majority of Assyrians originate from Iraq, with smaller numbers from Iran, Turkey, Syria and Lebanon. While a diverse community, there is a strong sense of collective identity and destiny.

This publication reports on research undertaken during 2004-5 as part of a twelve month project called 'Assyrian Community Capacity Building in Fairfield City'. The project was a partnership between the Assyrian Workers' Network and the University of Western Sydney and was also supported by the Assyrian Australian Association and the Fairfield Multicultural Health Service. Its aims were to identify service gaps and propose strategies to build the Assyrian community's capacity in Fairfield City. The project researched issues impacting upon different segments of the community and produced a resource booklet in both English and Assyrian.

Underscoring the project (and this report) is the fact that Assyrians in Fairfield City are quite capable of creatively responding to challenges. They are survivors and a people toughened by adversity throughout their long history. As put by one service provider:

I've seen a community passion for wanting to change things and it's really quite strong ... Sometimes I am quite in awe of that passion to move forward. So I won't be surprised if the Assyrian community's goals are achieved because that is how I perceive this community.

The observation summarises the dynamics of community capacity building; namely that it is driven by the community itself. And that it must begin with passion for change.

The following sections are written for service providers, Assyrian community organisations and Local, NSW State, and Federal Government policymakers. It provides something of a report card on Australia's multicultural society in relation to the experiences of Assyrians living in Fairfield City. It is also intended to provide important information to assist service providers working with the Assyrian community in Fairfield City. At the same time, the report presents challenges to the various Assyrian community organisations.

The report describes the key issues impacting the community and preventing it from moving ahead in terms of presenting a unified front to funding bodies and service providers. The discussion also highlights service gaps and recommends steps to service providers and government stakeholders for future capacity building. As will become clear, a recurring difficulty experienced by Assyrians relates to their misidentification. Many service providers simply do not know who Assyrians are and how best to deliver programs to them.

Building upon earlier research undertaken by the Assyrian Australian Association (AAA) (1997, 1993), and the AAA and Ettinger House (1997), this report provides a snapshot of the community at a particular point in time, namely 2005, and suggests directions for the community's future success. However, unlike the earlier research, which focused upon new arrivals and young people, the current project documents the experiences of the wider Assyrian community. As will become clear, while many Assyrians have been refugees, they are not a refugee community. Indeed, Assyrians have a forty year history in Fairfield City.

The first part of the report introduces the Assyrians by providing information about their immigration backgrounds, the impact of events in Iraq, their lives in Fairfield City, and demographic profile with the LGA. The discussion then addresses three aspects of the Assyrian community: cultural and church organisations and their provision of community infrastructure and leadership; the significance of families for the building of social capital; and the perceptions and needs of Assyrian young people. Consideration is then given to service providers and the challenges of integrating mainstream, settlement and ethno-specific services. Identity and cultural issues for service providers are then explored, and service gaps documented. Following these are a series of recommendations for capacity building both within the community and among service providers and government departments working with them. The report concludes with a brief discussion.

1 Assyrians: a global community

Assyrians are Syriac-speaking Christians who have traditionally been known by their Christian sectarian groups belonging to the Syriac-Orthodox, Syriac-Catholic, Assyrian Church of the East, Ancient Church of the East and the Chaldean Church. They identify as the indigenous people of Northern Iraq and contemporary descendants of the ancient Assyrian people who built the empires of Assyria and Babylon. In Mesopotamia, Assyrians rose to political influence and economic prosperity from about 2000 to 612 BC. After the fall of their empire, Assyrians were reduced to a small nation scattered in the Middle East. Assyrians were among the first people to embrace Christianity, and their traditional church—the Church of the East—dates back almost 2,000 years. Contemporary Assyrian identity is closely tied with tradition, culture, religion and language. As one woman described: ‘Assyrian identity is deeply rooted in the past. If we deny our past the future will deny us’.

Assyrians share the Syriac language, although there are two dialects (Western and Eastern Syriac) and they are almost mutually unintelligible in written form. Probably 95 percent of Assyrians living in Fairfield City speak the Eastern dialect. Because both dialects have different vowel systems they cannot easily read each other. Only those able to read ancient Syriac can comprehend both. The Eastern dialect is used by the Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the East, and the Chaldean Church. While the Western dialect is used by the Syriac-Orthodox and the Syriac-Catholic churches.

Despite thousands of years of displacement, Northern Iraq remains the national homeland for Assyrians who often refer to it as ‘Bet Nahrain’ (rendered into English, ‘the land between two rivers’, namely between the Tigris and Euphrates). There are no reliable statistics on the numbers of Assyrians remaining in Iraq. Most indicators suggest one million out of an estimated population of twenty-five million (while the total Assyrian population around the world is estimated at three million). In Northern Iraq the Assyrian population are mostly dispersed between the Kurdish-controlled region and the area directly to the south of it in the Nineveh and Kirkuk provinces. The region located between the Upper Zab and Tigris Rivers is often referred to as the ‘Assyrian triangle’ and considered the ancestral homeland of the Assyrian people. Since the 1950s increasing numbers have migrated to Baghdad, while significant populations remain in Mosul, Dohok, Kirkuk, Arbil and their surrounding villages.

Histories of trauma are familiar to all Assyrians. One participant insisted that: ‘the Assyrian nation sees itself as a crucifix’. She suggests the crucifix represents the collective trauma and the Christian faith—which are tied together in the Assyrian self-imagination.

Throughout the 20th century massive numbers of Assyrians fled religious and political persecution within Iraq, Iran and Turkey. Perhaps the most critical period was between 1915 and 1933 when

tens of thousands of Assyrians were massacred in the regions of Urmiah and Simel by Persian, Turkish, Kurdish and Arab forces in an effort to exterminate and/or drive the Christians off their original homelands. Over 120,000 Assyrians were displaced and ended up in refugee camps in places like Dohuk and Baghdad—a situation that drew the attention of the international community. As early as 9 October 1915, the *London Times* reported the massacre of 12,000 Assyrians in Urmiah. However, no official records are kept of the extent of the massacres during the period, yet Assyrians estimate significantly higher numbers due to the resulting hunger, and the loss of women and children to forced Islamic conversion during the period (cf. Yacoub 1986).

Since then, the Assyrians have been banished from one place to another and remained terminally caught between hostile government strategies, pan-Arabism, colonial/neo-imperial interventions (British, French and US oil interests), and the adverse determinations of transnational institutions (the League of Nations and, later, the United Nations). Added to this are longstanding clashes with the Kurds.

Under Saddam Hussein's rule (1979-2003), the Assyrians, while free to practise Christianity, were forced to support Iraqi nationalism. Many Assyrians refused and were persecuted for their anti-state attitudes. As one participant put it: 'In Iraq, you were either a member of the Ba'ath party or an enemy of the regime'. Like the Kurds and Shiite, the Assyrians suffered bloody reprisals by the Iraqi state following the Iran/Iraq war (1980 to 1988) and the Gulf War (1991). However, the impact on the Assyrian communities was disproportionate due to their smaller numbers. Since 1991, some Assyrians have experienced a degree of protection under US and British supervision of the autonomous Kurdish area of Northern Iraq. However, in the same area, much of the traditional Assyrian lands have been seized by Kurdish squatters and incorporated into a greater Kurdish controlled region (cf. Rubin 2003).

Another participant summarised the predicament: 'We [Assyrians] are nowhere because we are refugees everywhere'. In other words, in the collective mind, the label 'Assyrian' is synonymous with 'refugee' and 'displacement'. Masses have made their way out of Iraq and into urban centres in the Middle East, Europe, America and Australia.

As the diaspora has grown over the past thirty years, so too the Assyrian national movement has gained in popularity and political urgency. At the same time it has remained fragmented along denominational, regional and political lines. An array of political organisations exist, the principle vanguard being: the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM or Zowaa, based in Iraq); the Assyrian Democratic Organization (ADO, based in Syria); the Bet Nahrain Democratic Party (BNDP) and the Assyrian Universal Alliance (AUA) (both based in the US). Over the years, these parties have variously resourced (morally and financially) political and cultural activities within the Middle East and in diaspora centres.

Given such organisational efforts, in terms of nationalistic outlook the Assyrian populations—diaspora and homeland—are not highly politicised. The label ‘Assyrian’ carries mixed meanings and some Syriac-speaking groups do not want to identify with it. As Deniz (2000) suggests, the label ‘Assyrian’ expresses a vision rather than an existing reality: it is intended to be an ‘inclusive identity label which include[s] the different church communities, and transcends local and regional localities and affections’ (p. 49). But, at least at the grassroots level, the heterogeneous Syriac-speaking church denominations (Syriac-Orthodox, Syriac-Catholic, Assyrian Church of the East, Ancient Church of the East, and Chaldean Catholic) remain divided about the national movement. However, since the commencement of the US-led occupation of Iraq in 2003, a trend of cooperation and support has emerged at the leadership level to raise political awareness of the Assyrian condition.

Nevertheless, it seems the Assyrian national movement remains hamstrung by church loyalties. As one participant predicted: ‘It [Assyrian nationalism] will never work, because you can never get people together. They just want to stick with their churches’. Another participant declared she was proud to be Assyrian but stipulated: ‘My confidence is not in nationalism ... but in my church ... That is what keeps us together’. As she implies, the Assyrian churches have long linked populations around the world. Whether in Baghdad, Mosul, Tehran, Amman, Damascus, Moscow, Chicago or Sydney, via the church, Assyrians have long imagined themselves a global community.

2 Fairfield City: Australia's Assyrian centre

It is impossible to know exactly how many Assyrians reside in Australia. Community estimates suggest they number over 45,000 with more than half residing in Fairfield City. Most Assyrian-Australians are post-1992 entrants with permanent residence who traveled under the Australian Government's Humanitarian Program. The earlier Assyrian arrivals were generally migrants traveling under Iraqi documents in the 1960s and early-1970s (Assyrian Australian Association, 1997; Kinarah 1989: 41). In recent years, at least 150 Assyrian asylum seekers have traveled to Australia on boats from Indonesia.

Fairfield City is Sydney's most multicultural LGA, with 133 nationalities represented and over seventy languages spoken (Fairfield City Council, 2003). The 2001 ABS Census counted 95,343 people (53 percent) living in the 27 suburbs of Fairfield City who were born overseas. The principal countries of birth (in decreasing order) are Vietnam (24,904), Iraq (7,882), Cambodia (6,654) and Italy (5,346) (Community Relations Commission 2004).

Among Fairfield's Iraq-born population probably 95 percent are of Assyrian ancestry. Which leaves little doubt that Assyrians are the second largest ethnic group in Fairfield City. In simple terms, one in every ten persons residing in Fairfield City is of Assyrian ancestry. The emphasis upon ancestry is important because Assyrians are a heterogeneous collective who are tied together by a common ancestry with which they proudly identify.

2.1 Perceptions of Fairfield

Over the past thirty years the Fairfield CBD and its neighboring suburbs have become an Assyrian cultural centre. A plethora of Assyrian-owned and run businesses, cultural and political organisations and service providers can be found in the area. The Fairfield Public School and its neighboring High School have high proportions of Assyrian-background students, as too does Bossley Park High School.

We asked research participants what they thought and felt about Fairfield. During workshops we asked them to draw images and pictures that represent Fairfield. The guiding questions were: What is it about Fairfield that you like or do not like? Why did your family come to Fairfield? The participants enjoyed the exercise, and were happy to talk about their drawings.

In general, participants associated 'Fairfield' with the Fairfield CBD and its surrounding streets, which are an Assyrian hub. The positive images about Fairfield conveyed the value of having community nearby, churches, services, Assyrian-owned clubs and shops, family and friends, and the Assyrian Resource Centre. Some participant responses were: 'Fairfield reminds me of Iraq';

'My community is here'; 'Fairfield is local to all places'; 'The Assyrian shops are here'; 'Churches, family and friends, shopping and services'; and 'Very close to everything'.

Participants spoke of a sense of familial surroundings within Fairfield and of a thick network of social relations in the area. Most considered 'Fairfield' synonymous with 'Assyrian'. The two were twinned. Some even spoke of relatives overseas knowing about Fairfield. As one woman described:

When I visited Jordan last year, I was amazed ... the Assyrians there even knew about Fairfield. 'How is Fairfield?' they asked me. They know all about it because they receive letters and photos and watch videos from family and friends who live in Fairfield ... and even talk on the phone about Fairfield. Some even had the Fairfield newspaper. They see the name 'Fairfield' and learn about it ... Even in Iraq they know about Fairfield. It's in their minds.

The negative images of Fairfield related to illicit drugs, alleged police harassment, dangers to their families, the rising housing costs, and uncleanliness in the Fairfield CBD. However, the general view was that, despite the difficulties and rising rental costs, Assyrians will still live in Fairfield City because all the necessities of life are in close proximity—banks, doctors, Medicare, schools and Assyrian-owned shops. Access to services was frequently raised, especially doctors who spoke Assyrian which is very important, particularly to the mothers and seniors. Centrelink was often referred to as an important service in the area.

One young mother stated: 'I need to live in Fairfield'. The area provided her with language help, and as she put it: 'I can live close to schools, and get support from family and friends'. Another mother stated accessing child care in Fairfield as important, as well as community support, family support, interpreter services, and playgroups. Still another woman ranked the benefits of Fairfield: buses-trains, schools, language help, using banks, talking to someone, doctors, and children services. Some senior men spoke of the Assyrian-owned cafes in Fairfield CBD providing important meeting places to play dominoes and cards, and to drink coffee.

2.2 Settlement history

It is important to document how the Fairfield area became a place of significance to Assyrians in Australia and beyond. The following paraphrases a speech delivered by Mr Dinkha Warda which traces the history of Assyrian migration to Australia, with a specific focus upon how the community established itself in Fairfield.

The first Assyrian arrived in Australia in 1951. The late Brian Youkhana traveled from Lebanon to Sydney. Four years later he was joined by his brother and sister. Another family, that of Nimrod Thomas, arrived in the late 1950s and settled in Perth. From 1955 to 1960 Australia did not attract many Assyrians, but from late 1963 a growing number of Assyrians, especially from Iraq, immigrated to Australia. By 1965, there were around five Assyrian families and a few individuals living in Sydney. Most lived in the eastern suburbs, such as Paddington, Clovelly and Randwick. There was one exception, Alex Abraham and his family, who lived in Fairfield.

Australia's migration program expanded in the mid-1960s and many Assyrians migrated to Australia. As Warda describes, oral history estimates suggest during that period 4,500 Assyrians came from Iraq, 2,500 from Iran and 1,000 from Syria and Lebanon.

During the 1980s war between Iraq and Iran, large numbers of Assyrians fled Iraq and applied for refugee status. Reportedly, 903 Assyrian arrivals were admitted under the Australian Government's Special Humanitarian Program and smaller numbers under the Family Reunion Program. Most of the Assyrians settled in New South Wales with a small proportion in Victoria. An estimated 80 percent of the arrivals settled in the suburbs of Fairfield City. This is now a permanent trend, with Fairfield remaining the settlement centre for new Assyrian arrivals in Australia.

The key question is: why Fairfield? What was it that drew the Assyrians to the area? Dinkha Warda attributes this to a decision made in 1966. As he puts it:

The reason is that back in 1966, a small meeting was held between the early settlers to decide the future of Assyrians in this country. At this important meeting was Mr Alex Abraham, one of the pioneers already living in Fairfield. Also attending was Mr Youaw Kanna, who presented a planning map of the Fairfield district issued by the NSW Department of Planning. This map showed that Fairfield in thirty years time would grow and reach the size it has become today.

In 1966, Fairfield's developed area went west up to the Cumberland Highway, the rest was farming land and Crown Land. The majority of those attending the meeting agreed to establish the Assyrian community in Fairfield. The reason was to centralise the development of all the Assyrian social, religious and sporting

activities, allowing greater access and participation. If we remained in the Sydney city area, we would have scattered. And so, four or five families purchased fibro houses in Fairfield (including myself), and a few bought blocks of land.

In 1969, following the settlement of these families in the Fairfield area, the Assyrian Australian Association (AAA) was formed and incorporated. The Association's objectives included: providing social and recreational activities; promoting cultural development; assisting English language learning; improving employment opportunities for Assyrians; promoting Assyrian migration to Australia; and advancing relations between Assyrians and other Australians.

Since those early years, the Assyrians in Fairfield City have established and built various clubs, churches, Saturday language schools and sporting teams. There are now fourteen junior soccer teams and three open soccer teams. Perhaps the most significant achievement has been the opening of St Hurmiz Primary School—the first full time Assyrian school to be established among the international diaspora. Another important achievement has been the Assyrian Resource Centre (formerly known as the Assyrian Welfare Office) which is located opposite Fairfield Station and assisting up to 3,500 people per year.

These achievements highlight the capacity of Assyrians to address the challenges they face in Australia. However, since the mid-1990s, Assyrians in Fairfield City have begun to face new challenges in the form of refugees arriving who are traumatised and disadvantaged to a greater extent than the earlier arrivals. Again, these new arrivals are settling in central Fairfield, while the pre-mid-1990s arrivals have purchased houses in the more affluent suburbs of Fairfield City such as Bossley Park, Edensor Park, Greenfield Park and Wakeley. As will be discussed in section 5, the fast growing community has also become fractured along denominational, nationalist and regional lines. In many respects, the dynamics among the wider Assyrian diaspora and in Iraq have played out in Fairfield and impacted upon the community in positive and negative ways. Some sources spoke of the current period as a 'critical time' for the wider Assyrian community in Fairfield or, as others have it, a 'transitional period' when events in Iraq are impacting upon the local community in Fairfield City.

There is an increased complexity within the community which hampers the capacity to respond to pressing needs. This includes third generation Assyrian-Australians and new arrivals who apparently feel little in common, and an ageing formal leadership that has limited interaction with the younger generations and the new arrivals. Unlike the early years, the community is now large, patently fractured into a plethora of competing groups and sub-groups, and without any legitimate organising peak/umbrella body from which to relate in unity to government authorities. Before exploring the challenges in more detail, the following section provides a statistical profile of the Assyrians living in Fairfield City.

3 Statistical profile of the community

The following points provide an official statistical snapshot of the Assyrian population residing in Fairfield LGA. The figures are taken from the now dated 2001 ABS Census tallies for Assyrian/Chaldean Ancestry and Assyrian-Speakers. The community has rapidly expanded since 2001 and the Census figures are grossly understated compared to the Assyrian community's own estimates.

3.1 Population, origin and migration

- 9,520 Fairfield LGA residents stated they were of Assyrian/Chaldean ancestry. 7,310 of these were overseas born.
- 8,879 Fairfield LGA residents stated they spoke Assyrian at home. The Assyrian-speakers living in NSW were 13,241.
- Between the 1996 and 2001 Census there was a 31% population increase among Assyrian-speakers in Fairfield LGA (up by 2,111). In NSW the increase was 38% (up by 3,654).
- 61% of Fairfield's Assyrian-speaking population were born in Iraq and 20% are Australian born (followed by Iran 8%, Syria 4%, Lebanon 1% and Turkey 1%).
- People from Iraq have been the fastest growing overseas born group in Fairfield LGA between 1996 and 2001. The 2001 Census counted 7,882 residents an increase of 51.2% on the 1996 Census figure of 5,214.
- The majority of Iraq born Fairfield LGA residents are of Assyrian/Chaldean background.
- Approximately 15% of humanitarian entrants assisted under the IHSS since 2001 were of Assyrian/Chaldean background (DIMIA 2004).
- In 2003-4, 2% of Australia's humanitarian intake identified as Assyrian and 3% identified as Chaldean. An additional 7.7% of entrants identified as Iraqi.

3.2 Family composition and age distribution

- High proportion of large families with five members or more (29%)
- High proportion of children and young people.
- Assuming most of the Iraq-born population living in Fairfield LGA are Assyrians, the age distribution is heavily weighted toward young people (13-24 years 18%; 25-54 years 57%).
- A small proportion are aged over 55 years (55-64 years 9%; and 65+ 7%).

3.3 Religious affiliations

- Most identify with Church of the East religious traditions.
- Significant numbers also affiliate with Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Pentecostal religious traditions.

3.4 Language and education

- Assyrian is the third most commonly spoken language other than English in the Fairfield LGA (behind Vietnamese and Cantonese).
- Slightly more males (4,489) than females (4,402) are Assyrian speakers.
- High proportion cannot speak English well (25%).
- High proportion of those aged 15+ are without educational qualifications and not attending an educational institution (55%).

3.5 Labour force status

- High levels of unemployed and/or not in the labour force (48%).
- Those employed, generally work in the manufacturing (39%) and trade/accommodation/hospitality/transport industries (31%).
- High proportion with low weekly individual incomes (36% less than \$200).

3.6 Distribution by suburbs and tenure type

- Fairfield (25%) and Bossley Park (14%) are the most popular suburbs. Followed by Edensor Park (7.5%), Greenfield Park (7%) and Fairfield West (7%).
- High proportion in private rental accommodation (52%).
- Recent arrivals are generally privately renting in the suburbs of Fairfield, Fairfield West and Fairfield Heights.
- 43% fully own and/or purchasing their home.
- Earlier arrivals are generally owning and/or purchasing homes in the Parks suburbs of Fairfield LGA (Bossley Park, Edensor Park, Greenfield Park) and in Wakeley.

It is impossible to know exactly how many Assyrians reside in Fairfield City. Various community and religious leaders suggested there were at least 20,000 community members living in the area. Because Assyrians do not have their own internationally recognised country there is a limited amount of accurate Census data available for them. The lack of recognition in the Census figures ensures they remain relatively 'invisible' and continually categorised as a small and newly-emerging community in Australia.

The Census ancestry question is probably the most useful in terms of counting Assyrians, indeed, more people indicated Assyrian ancestry (9,520) than those who claimed to speak Assyrian at home (8,879). Like ancestry, the Census figures for 'language spoken at home' are understated. This is because most Assyrians come from Arabic-speaking countries and many will speak Arabic at home and use Arabic interpreter services. When responding to the 'language spoken at home' Census question, they may put Arabic without realising their response will be counted toward the Arabic-speaking population. At the same time they will staunchly identify themselves as Assyrians and not Arabs (a theme returned to in section 9).

4 Research approach

This report is based upon a series of research activities which included group workshop consultations, a large public forum, and one-on-one interviews. In total the report derives from the input from over one hundred Assyrians and forty-one workers from various service providers in Fairfield City. The Assyrians included seniors, young people, young mothers, volunteers, church leaders, and community sector workers. Mainstream service providers in the Fairfield LGA were interviewed and participated in a half day Assyrian Community Capacity Building Forum.

Apart from the short statistical profile offered in the previous section, a qualitative approach was chosen because the aim of this report is to provide an in-depth picture of what is happening among Assyrians in Fairfield City. Quantitative survey-based methods are of limited use with groups who are not literate in English. Rather than trying to cover the breadth of the Assyrian community with surveys, it was decided that a qualitative non-random and targeted approach would be of more value. This provided a richness of data that enabled more explanation about what is happening.

The target population were people from various segments of the broader Assyrian community. They included seniors, new arrivals, mothers, men and young people. The secondary population were service providers in the local area. The following sub-sections describe the various approaches.

Interviews with service providers and Assyrian leaders

The research began with semi-structured face-to-face interviews with fourteen workers from selected service providers in Fairfield City and various Assyrian community and church leaders. The interviewees were chosen because they had particular knowledge and expertise about the Assyrian community. The service providers included a health worker, youth worker, police, school teachers, family support worker, and settlement workers. The interviews were typically of one hour duration and aimed to narrow and focus the research by identifying key themes for further research. Each worker was asked to describe what they considered the most important issues facing the Assyrian community in Fairfield City.

Assyrian community workshop consultations

With the assistance of the workers previously interviewed, a series of workshop consultations were conducted with seven groups of Assyrians at various Fairfield locations (during September to November 2004). In total, sixty-eight people participated in these workshops. The project team negotiated the time and place for each session with workers from various services. Each workshop typically had between six to twelve participants who were recruited with the assistance of service providers (although the seniors group numbered twenty-seven and were divided in two). Nearly all workshops were conducted in the Assyrian language, with the bilingual research assistant playing a key role.

To explore the research themes, various creative activities were undertaken during the workshops. For instance, participants were asked to draw the things they liked and disliked about Fairfield. Another exercise involved participants planning settlement services for new arrivals in Fairfield and identifying service gaps. Participants enthusiastically expressed their ideas and feelings about the research themes. The workshops offered a safe environment where they could share experiences and attitudes in the company of people with similar backgrounds.

Immediately following each workshop session the research team spent up to one hour discussing the session and recalling participants' comments and observations. These debriefings were audio-recorded which provided a rich qualitative record of each workshop.

Assyrian Community Capacity Building Forum

On 22 March 2005, a half-day forum was held at the Fairfield Community Hall to discuss Assyrian community capacity building. Service providers and members of the Assyrian community were invited.

The forum was attended by sixty-two people representing service providers with programs in Fairfield City. They included Centrelink, DIMIA, NSW DoCs, NSW DET, NSW DoH, Fairfield High School, Fairfield Public School, Fairfield Police, Fairfield Community Resource Centre (FCRC), Fairfield Library, Fairfield City Council, STARTTS, Fairfield Hospital, Fairfield Multicultural Health Service, and Karitane.

Two workshop sessions were conducted during the forum around the themes of service gaps and community capacity building strategies. Data was collected from the participants via small group discussions which were recorded on butcher's paper and subsequently collated into themes.

5 Assyrian organisations and community infrastructure

A primary aspect of Assyrian community capacity building is developing healthy organisations which assist members to reach their individual and collective potential as participants in Australian society. Organisations may be viewed as the community's infrastructure which, like the construction of a house, frame the community's development. In this case, Assyrian organisations act as important centres where people meet to share with one another their life journeys and future hopes. They are sites of affirmation from where Assyrians find support and respite from an often hostile world.

Since the mid-1960s members of the Assyrian community have worked to build an array of organisations and institutions around the Fairfield area. As early as 1966 the Assyrian Australian Club (AAC) was formed. However, the Assyrian Australian Association (AAA) was the first incorporated cultural organisation established in Sydney. It has historically been an important source of leadership, contributing significantly to the development of the community. It has been the primary builder of the infrastructure of the Assyrian community in Fairfield. And from it have come community leaders and individuals who have moved on to establish and work with other organisations.

The Assyrians are disposed to and very good at organising. This strength has enabled them to survive thousands of years of adversity. It has also enabled them to thrive in Fairfield City. At the same time, the Assyrians in Fairfield City are organisationally divided among themselves.

This section provides an overview of various Assyrian organisations based in Fairfield City, and evaluates their effectiveness. It presents the reader with a summary of the current issues facing Assyrian organisations and suggests various ways to build their capacity.

5.1 Organisations based in Fairfield City

Assyrian-Australians living in Fairfield City and its surrounding suburbs number over 20,000. They have four churches (as in church buildings), two Federations and several cultural and social organisations. There is no lack of diversity among the multitude of organisations which cover the spectrum of religious, political, social, cultural, sporting, humanitarian/welfare and educational enterprises. It is difficult to count exactly how many Assyrian organisations are based in Fairfield City. Suffice to say there are probably over fifty. They vary in size and levels of activity. The various organisations are representative of the diversity within the community in terms of church and tribal loyalties, politics and homeland ties. The following is a sample of thirty-two Assyrian organisations/groups with PO Box addresses in Fairfield City. It is not an exhaustive list.

Associations/Federations

Assyrian Federation of Australia
Assyrian Australian National Federation
Assyrian Australian Association
NSW Babylon Cultural Association
Assyrian Charity and Educational Community

Social/Cultural Clubs

Ashur Club
Nineveh Sports and Community Club
Assyrian Sports and Cultural Club
Gilgamesh Cultural Centre (Bonnyrigg)
Chaldean Cultural Centre

Religious

Ancient Church of the East—St Zaia Cathedral
St Thomas Chaldean Catholic Church
St Mary's Assyrian Church of the East
St Hurmizd Assyrian Church of the East

Humanitarian/Welfare

Assyrian Aid Society
Assyrian Relief Fund
Assyrian Resource Centre
Assyrian Workers' Network

Political

Assyrian Democratic Movement
Assyrian Democratic Organisation
Assyrian Patriotic Party
Assyrian National Organisation
Assyrian Universal Alliance
Bet Nahrain Democratic Party

Educational

Assyrian Diqlat School
Nissibin Assyrian School
The Assyrian Australian Academic Society
Urhai School
St Hurmizd Assyrian Primary School

Media

Ur Ashur Assyrian Radio Program

Echo from Nineveh Assyrian Radio Program

Assyrian Language Program—SBS Radio

To the uninitiated outsider the array of Assyrian organisations and associations comprise a complex and perhaps confusing picture. Many of the organisations have strong ties with other groups and may in fact be satellite organisations. For instance, the Assyrian Australian Association (AAA) is the sponsor of the Nineveh Sports and Community Club, the Assyrian Diqlat School, and the Assyrian Resource Centre. In 2005 there were twenty-three soccer teams registered under the Nineveh Sports and Community Club umbrella. Meanwhile, the Assyrian Sports and Cultural Club support the Nissibin Assyrian School, and has ties with the Assyrian Federation in Australia.

Worth noting is the absence of Assyrian women's associations in Fairfield City, although various women's group do meet under the banner of other groups. This is surprising given the highly active Assyrian Women's Union in Iraq. Assyrian women also have various organisations in Sweden and the United States.

5.2 Churches: the hub of the community

The most authoritative organisations for Assyrians are their churches. Although religious institutions, the churches have major input into the shape of the community, and the church leaders are authorities. While many Assyrians are not regular Sunday attenders, their church remains an authority in their lives. The churches provide places where people gather and connect with their past and celebrate life stages (births, marriages, deaths etc.).

The churches are probably the easiest access point for Assyrians to get involved in community activities. Unlike other community-based organisations, the churches are generally accessible to all Assyrians and important venues for community participation. They are always recruiting volunteers and providing opportunities for new arrivals to connect with the wider community.

At the same time, the broader Assyrian community in Fairfield City has long been divided along church lines, although this is changing as the young people are identifying more with the pan-Assyrian national movement than particular church affiliations.

There are at least five different churches which are independent from each other: the Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Syrian Catholic Church, the Syrian Orthodox Church. Added to this are various Protestant Assyrian churches scattered across Fairfield.

In general, the churches are trying to play a positive role addressing a range of social issues impacting the community in Fairfield City. Various interviews with church leaders highlighted a bleak picture of the issues impacting the community. They were concerned about the levels of gambling and marriage break-up. The Assyrian Church of the East, the Ancient Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church are all developing programs for young people, with varying success.

The Assyrian Church of the East has the largest membership base and is probably the most active in terms of programs and projects. They have two church buildings (and four parishes), one in Greenfield Park (St Hurmizd) and the other on Polding Street, in Fairfield (St Mary's). They have a youth group and a weeknight Bible Study which have been very popular among the young people. In 2005 they commenced an English-speaking Parish which targets second and third generation Assyrian-Australians. The church also established a Primary School which is located behind the Cathedral in Greenfield Park. The Ancient Church of the East (St Zaia Cathedral) and the Chaldean Catholic Church (St Thomas) are also popular and have their own buildings at Hoxton Park and Bossley Park, respectively.

In the late-1980s there was a major church split in the Church of the East in Fairfield which profoundly impacted and divided the community. This was a very difficult period for Assyrians in Fairfield City. The drama resulted in legal proceedings over property rights which received national media coverage. As a result, the Church of the East in Australia now has two denominations which follow different religious calendars. They are often referred to as the 'old' (Ancient Church of the East) and the 'new' (Assyrian Church of the East) calendar churches. An offshoot of the church division was the emergence of new community-based organisations. In recent years, the Chaldean Catholic Church in Fairfield City has distanced itself from its previous Assyrian identification which has introduced new complexities into the community's dynamic. The Chaldeans are aligned with the Roman Catholic Church.

The key challenge in the years ahead is to find ways to get the churches to work with the community-based organisations/associations. This is vital if long term solutions are to be achieved across a range of issues impacting the community.

5.3 Building organisational partnerships

During the Assyrian Community Capacity Building Forum we asked participants what they thought needed to be done to build the capacity of Assyrian organisations in Fairfield City. Some responses were:

'Work with and inform leaders of the community about processes and to recognise problems, such as too high expectations.'

'Develop an umbrella body of various Assyrian organisations.'

'Build the capacity to communicate between Assyrian run services.'

'Harness the potential of the various Assyrian groups and organisations to network together for the benefit of themselves and all Assyrians in Fairfield.'

'Help us to see our similarities (beliefs, values, problems in our past etc.) to build a feeling of support and togetherness.'

'Increase partnerships with churches.'

The key theme to emerge was a sharp sense of dissatisfaction with the inability of organisations to cooperate and build partnerships. Many spoke about the potential and the strength of their numbers but bemoaned the wasting of opportunities to work together. People stressed the need for a more participatory democratic culture within Assyrian organisations.

A new paradigm of inter-organisational partnerships needs to be developed. The general feeling was that it could be strategically nurtured. As one participant put it: 'Our big organisations have to work strategically with various sections of the community to promote the fact that they are not biased and are accessible'. Another participant summed up the difficulty: 'We can't find any agreement in our community and so we can't speak with one voice. It is holding us back so much that our organisations are in competition.' Still another reflected, 'People within the Assyrian nation find it very difficult to achieve unity. We need to develop strategies now so that in five years time it will happen.'

Among project participants, the consensus was that building unity was very difficult and that it is not possible for one organisation to act as the representative of the entire community. Instead, it was more worthwhile to work towards some sort of peak or umbrella body through which Assyrians could present themselves to government authorities and outsiders. One participant emphasised that a '... peak body's sole purpose is to represent a group and to represent all the sub-groups equally. Maybe five years from now it could happen.' Even at a global level Assyrians are still trying to develop a representative body that can present Assyrian claims to the world community.

Ideally an umbrella or peak body would be made up of representatives from the various organisations. A current (albeit limited) example is the Assyrian Australian National Federation (AANF), each member organisation has invested in the Federation and has a voice on its board. But the Federation does not have the support of the different segments of the community.

Historically, the AAA has been the catalyst to develop the infrastructure within the Assyrian community. In this sense it has the historical legitimacy to be a representative body, and to Local,

State and Federal Government authorities it does often represent the Assyrian community. For instance DIMIA may approach AAA. The AAA is frequently called upon by government authorities to represent the Assyrian community at functions and events. But other Assyrian organisations will not recognise the AAA as the representative organisation. It has some difficult relationships with certain segments of the Assyrian community.

There are already signs of partnerships from which the community can see the value of working together. The Assyrian New Year celebrations held on 26 March 2005 at the Fairfield Showgrounds was a good example of partnerships in practice. Various Assyrian cultural and political organisations worked together for this event. It was organised by the AANF and supported by other political and cultural groups.

An outcome was that people felt positive about their community, especially upon witnessing ten thousand Assyrians gathered in the one location. They also received praise from government bodies. The event was covered in the local newspapers and politicians came vying for the attention of the community, even the former NSW Premier Bob Carr was there. As one participant described: 'We walked away from that event saying "Next year you'll see even more of what we can do together"'. Events like the Assyrian New Year show a positive community spirit operating. Experiences like that should lead towards creating an umbrella body without people thinking about the negative side of the community.

A process is needed which can engage the Assyrian community generally to learn and appreciate what it means to be in partnership. That will be extremely beneficial by enabling people to start moving toward establishing a peak umbrella body at some time. The immediate priority is to provide training and resourcing to the community, and engaging Assyrian organisations around building partnerships.

Many people who participated in our research said they did not feel valued by Assyrian organisations, especially those who had worked hard and put a lot of time into projects but came away feeling unappreciated. Again a paradigm change is needed here which sees organisations proactively nurturing and crediting participants. This will entail organisations implementing quality management systems which encourage individuals and their initiative. Added to this is the need for professional and personal development plans to produce future leaders.

6 Building social capital within families

Fairfield offers important resources to Assyrians and this is why many chose to live in the area. In many respects, Fairfield provides the physical infrastructure (neighborhoods, shops, churches, organisations, families and friends) for producing 'social capital'. This section discusses the importance of social capital for Assyrian community capacity building, with a focus upon the role of families.

There is considerable evidence that families play a lead role in the development and sustainability of strong communities (cf. Stone 2001). It is through families that social networks develop. Communities with high levels of social capital are more likely to benefit from lower crime figures, better health, higher educational achievement, and economic growth. They are also more likely to extend trust to strangers. Inversely, communities lacking in social capital will manifest serious social problems (cf. Beem 1999:20). The following pages describe the barriers to building social capital among Assyrians in Fairfield. The discussion highlights the challenges presented by family stress and transition to a post-traditional Australian society, and proposes strategies to promote social capital within families and the community.

6.1 Defining social capital

Social capital and community capacity building are integrally connected, but they are not the same. The former is a prerequisite for the latter. Social capital may be understood as a resource for collective action (Stone 2001:4). It is 'the quality of social relationships between individuals that affect their capacity to address and resolve problems they face in common' (Stewart-Weeks and Richardson 1998: 2). Social capital is an attribute of families, neighbourhoods, and communities created by everyday interactions between people. It originates from people forming social networks based on principles of trust, mutual understanding, reciprocity and shared values (Cohen and Prusak 2001:4). These networks may be understood as the 'structural' elements of social capital which enable people to build communities, and to commit themselves to each other. In general, social capital is utilised more effectively by groups with strong cultural boundaries and a collective sense of identity (Giorgas 2000). Certainly, the Assyrians in Fairfield City fit this category.

There are various indicators of social capital, which include: health status, suicide rates, crime rates, employment and unemployment rates, family income, participation rates in tertiary education, marital status formations and dissolutions, and business confidence. In this respect, social capital is not merely about social life, but has important economic and community benefits.

Economic development and upward mobility are measures of a community's growing capacity. Assyrians who are unable to readily access appropriate economic resources from society more

widely can access and utilise their community's social resources and networks to improve their chances for economic success (cf. Giorgas 2000:5). In this regard, social capital can act as a mobility ladder. The community provides support and in some cases economic and employment opportunities. For instance, an array of Assyrian-owned small businesses around Fairfield are embedded in the social relations of the community. However, the flipside of ethno-specific business ventures is limited attempt to enter into the mainstream.

Educational outcomes are also a measure of social capital and capacity building. Many second-generation Assyrians have been provided with positive reinforcement about the value of educational attainment as an important factor for economic mobility. Voluntary associations such as The Assyrian Australian Academic Society (TAAAS) offer educational resources to the younger Australian-born second (and in some cases third) generation. Similarly, the Rabi Nemrod Simono Scholarship (established in 1986 by the AAA) has assisted the academic pathways of various Assyrian young people.

6.2 Family life and social capital

Research indicates that families are the most fundamental source of social capital (cf. Putnam 2000; Newton 1997). Families are the primary association to which community members belong. Moreover, cooperative family-based bonds of trust and reciprocity can bridge over to community networks.

Like other migrant groups, the Assyrians place great stress upon the wellbeing and protection of families. They tend to idealise traditional family practices and kinship obligations. It is typically assumed that good families are male-headed, with husband and wife, children and extended members living together. They also hold conservative views about sexuality and gender roles. Such traditionalism is both a source of continuity and difficulty in Australia's post-traditional society, where a diversity of family household forms and living arrangements are recognised.

Assyrians are collectivist in outlook and strong links exist between the individual, the family and the community. Social capital within the community exists in the relationships among parents, between parents their children and extended relatives, and in their relations with the institutions of the community (Giorgas 2000:8). In this system, the social status and honor an individual achieves is valuable to the family and to the community more generally. Therefore, individuals have a responsibility not only to themselves but also to their family and community. There is a degree of closure to such Assyrian family/community network relations which promotes a strong sense of solidarity and belonging, and access to resources that are particularly important in overcoming disadvantage.

Generally speaking, Assyrians are not comfortable with the uncertainty of individuals being solely responsible for setting and negotiating their own family and life patterns. They consider divorce, one-parent families, falling marriage rates, and the birth of children outside of marriage destructive of their community's social security. However, irrespective of traditional values, family practices, household forms, gender roles and sexual preferences within the community are diversifying. For example, there are growing numbers of one-parent families and young people leaving home before marriage.

6.3 Family difficulties

The general concern among research participants was that many Assyrian families are not coping well in Australia and a great deal are in crisis—especially the post-1990 arrivals with refugee backgrounds. Family difficulties present serious challenges to community capacity building because healthy families are vital to the prosperity and longevity of the community. Supportive family contexts will lead to stronger aspirations and eventually higher social-status attainments. Alternatively, family breakdown leads to poverty and arrested development.

There are numerous isolated families and individuals who are not adequately accessing their own community nor the broader Fairfield community. It is necessary for the community to outreach to them. Family support services also have a key role to play and need to use programs to connect Assyrian clients with their community. In particular, they should look to working in partnership with Assyrian churches.

Our research suggests that Fairfield-based Assyrian families in stress or crisis will likely relate to a range of characteristics, including:

- having one-parent living in the household;
- receiving Centrelink pensions or benefits;
- carrying large financial debts
- residing in public housing or renting privately;
- living in situations where domestic violence is an issue;
- formerly refugees who fled organised violence in Iraq; and
- financially supporting displaced relatives overseas who remain in situations of danger and uncertainty.

Combined together, these characteristics highlight the array of issues impacting family functioning.

Over the coming decade, a challenge for the Assyrian community will be to increase the likelihood that the families of second and third generation Assyrian-Australians will maintain connections with their community. For the community to survive, their families will need to bridge across to community networks (Winter 2000:14). As such, the mediation of the relationship between family-based social capital and community networks must be a priority for Assyrian community organisations. Four interrelated obstacles to building social capital within families are discussed below.

6.4 Intergenerational parent/child dynamics

Conflicts between children and their parents, and misunderstanding about rights and responsibilities were considered major difficulties leading to communication breakdowns between parents and their children. Added to this are language barriers as siblings speak English in the home, whereas the parents may not be competent English speakers. One community member described a common pattern:

Families from Iraq face many difficulties. The young people quickly learn about Australia. Then it becomes like they 'parent' their parents, because the parents shrink into their own little world, they can't cope with all the changes and they want to go back to Iraq. They say to themselves: 'I have made a big mistake bringing my family to Australia'. So the parents feel frustrated ... they just stay inside and get depressed. The children are outside learning about the new society and language but the parents are just staying in their own world. So they start to look to their kids for advice about the new society.

One youth worker described the cultural complexities experienced by young people within many recently arrived families:

Young people try to adopt the Australian way quickly and this causes conflict within the family. They try to be Australian outside and Assyrian inside their home environment, so our young people have double lives. In fact, most young Assyrians lead double lives. They have to pretend they are good Assyrians to their families and the community ... then they have to adjust to life at school with their friends.

Evidently, the key questions many parents have are: 'How can I raise my children in Australia?' and 'How can I keep them safe?' Even though the majority of parents were educated overseas they feel frustrated because they do not have the English language competencies to understand their children and to help them with life in Australia, especially school-related activities.

Various service providers attempt to assist families in transition via training sessions around parenting themes, such as 'Living with Teenagers' and the 'Families in Cultural Transition' (FiCT) program developed by STARTTS. Evidently, while targeting families, these programs often interest mothers, and gain little participation from fathers and young men.

To deal with families more effectively, there is a pressing need for the NSW Government to initiate a Youth Partnership with the Assyrian community in Fairfield LGA, similar in type to the currently funded Arabic-speaking and Pacific Islander Youth Partnerships. With a focus upon youth and community liaison, an inter-departmental Youth Partnership will draw in DoCS and the CRC to address family support issues impacting the community. The Assyrian churches have the potential to play a lead role in a Youth Partnership program with the Assyrian community associations and mainstream service providers. For instance, a youth team from the Ancient Church of the East conduct regular youth outreach on Fairfield's streets. With a focus upon youth and community liaison, an inter-departmental Youth Partnership will draw in DoCS and the CRC to address family support issues impacting the community. The Assyrian churches have the potential to play a lead role in a Youth Partnership program with the Assyrian community associations and mainstream service providers. For instance, a youth team from the Ancient Church of the East conduct regular youth outreach on Fairfield's streets.

6.5 Fathers and young men

Concerns about fathers and young men were consistently raised during this project. It was felt that many fathers do not understand their roles in Australia because their traditional authority as the head of the home has been undermined. The family dynamic is often restructured which creates, as one participant put it, 'an earthquake in the family structure'. Gorgees (2003:42) sums up the situation, 'Assyrian men are very good fathers, and have good relations with their sons and daughters, but it is difficult for them to adjust to the new cultural environment in Australia ... it is time to give more attention to "how can fathers manage their relationships with their family?"'

Although family support workers and programs intend to work with the whole family as a system, it seems that Assyrian men are not inclined to take up such services. We found that fathers and young men/older boys are unlikely to participate. The take-up is largely with mothers and their children. Clearly family support programs are needed which target fathers.

It was felt that a significant number of Assyrian young men have a propensity for violence which is tied to an incapacity to manage anger. As one community member described, many of these young men '... cannot control their anger. They have a reputation for being very angry and for treating women badly'. One worker thought that anger is potentially 'a real problem among these young Assyrian men ... I think that we need to be doing something proactive around the theme of anger management.'

Trust and safety are core ingredients for the production of positive social capital. To this extent, the difficulties with frustrated unemployed young men who have abandoned formal education are considered a major challenge to the community's capacity building. These young men are difficult to access and require community outreach at Fairfield and Wetherill Park.

Crime and safety issues featured in discussions and tied to this were concerns about the impact of drugs and violence upon young Assyrian men. Many participants indicated they wanted to make interconnections with each other in a safe environment, but felt this was very difficult in the Fairfield CBD because of the group presence of 'aggressive' young men.

6.6 Gender attitudes and domestic violence

Domestic violence has become a major concern in the community, but also remains shameful to talk about. Anecdotal evidence suggests there are many women and children who suffer quietly for a long time without any improvement in their situation. It was felt that gender attitudes among the Assyrian community, family members, and perhaps some women themselves, ensured that domestic violence was never confronted as a social issue affecting the community.

The Assyrian community is patriarchal and men and women generally conform to their roles in family and community contexts. Many participants attributed this as an influence from the Arab culture into which most Assyrians were born and raised. Under this dynamic, newly arrived women are most at risk of becoming isolated and stressed. However, it was also emphasised that women's roles as family managers are highly valued, and that decision making about family matters is strongly influenced by them.

Women are less fluent in English than men and many older Assyrian women who have been in Australia for years lack basic English language skills. This creates dependency upon men and severely limits their capacity to access support services themselves.

One project participant insisted that: 'Assyrian men in Australia need to learn to respect women more'. Another participant described how, 'We need to educate the newly arrived men that if you have a girlfriend or wife that does not mean you can do whatever you want with her. We have to educate men that even yelling and slamming your fist on the table is still domestic violence in Australia'.

Family members and friends often view domestic violence as a private matter. The experience of domestic violence victims is typically that friends or relatives usually do not want to know or to be involved in a family dispute because their interference will not be welcome. Educational programs for men and women are needed to prevent domestic violence and avoid its family breakdown

consequences. There needs to be an Assyrian-speaking worker involved with the domestic violence network in the Fairfield area.

6.7 Trauma and mental health

Probably all Assyrian families are impacted by trauma of one kind or another. The pre-arrival experiences of torture and human rights abuse are common among Assyrian refugees. Nevertheless, there appears to be a low take-up of mental health services among Assyrians.

Participants attributed this to the lack of information in the Assyrian language and there not being enough Assyrian-speaking counsellors. They also felt that Assyrians have limited knowledge about the role of counselling. It is a new concept to the community. Assyrians prefer to keep serious personal problems to themselves or discuss them with close friends or to the eldest member of the family. Developing trust with a professional service provider is very difficult for them, as too is building awareness of trauma counselling among the community.

Mental health issues were of particular concern for newly arrived refugees. Symptoms such as anxiety and depression often lead to family conflict, and these are caused by many factors such as the inability to sponsor a relative, feeling isolated in Australian society, and the affects of long term exposure to torture and war trauma. Many issues related to the parents' and grandparents' trauma are passed onto the next generation, as one worker described:

Even Assyrian children born in Australia have nightmares about what happened to their parents, or even their parents' parents ... they see it happening to them. Time is coming back. This is tied to them growing-up hearing the stories of atrocities over and over again. Because the parents will usually sit in the loungeroom and talk about seeing someone get their head cut-off or something like that and it sticks in the child's mind.

That particular 'someone' is usually a family member, a relative or a close family friend and such accounts are part of the collective Assyrian experience.

Unlike their Australian-born counterparts, many recently arrived children have their own fresh memories of violence which they often do not want to talk about. Whereas the early-1990s arrivals who are now teenagers may, as one worker put it, 'be in denial and try to blank out of their minds the refugee period of their lives'. Another group are Assyrians holding Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), who feel they cannot deal at all with trauma until their residency status is finalised. Trauma also extends to crimes against relatives and orphaned children who are stranded in the Middle East.

6.8 Financial problems

Financial problems are tied to all of the above concerns. Unemployment is a major factor. So too is the propensity of Assyrians to buy large houses to accommodate their large families, which entail huge debts they cannot service. At the same time, many new arrivals begin life in Australia with sizable debts to their sponsors which must be repaid immediately. Added to the above are financial obligations to stranded relatives remaining in the Middle East. As such, most families are living well beyond their means and carry large debts.

In recent years, the community was profoundly impacted by the Karl Solomon pyramid investment scandal which specifically targeted Assyrian community networks throughout Fairfield. Hundreds of families lost money in this scam which severely eroded trust in the community and left many families homeless. Gambling problems with poker machines at the larger clubs in the Fairfield area, such as the Marconi and Mounties clubs, remain an ongoing source of difficulty for many families. One participant insisted that: '... probably 20 percent of families in our community are broken and divorced because of gambling at the clubs'.

Most participants thought there was a correlation between alcohol and gambling, especially among the newly arrived in Australia. This was considered to be the case in regard to the use of poker machines. Some community members suggested those with gambling problems are typically men on low incomes 'looking for an easier way to "get rich"'. Whereas, health and community workers tended to view problem gambling as a health problem. They tied grief and depression with gambling fixation. A community information seminar on financial budgeting and gambling problems was held in February 2003. A subsequent therapeutic program was held, which indicated the need to organise a group intervention program dealing with problem gambling. There is a lack of resource material about problem gambling in the Assyrian language.

As stated at the outset of this section, families play a lead role in the development and sustainability of strong communities. For this reason, it is vital that Assyrian organisations and mainstream service providers work together to alleviate stress and build the capacities of families to confidently engage with the world around them.

7 Young people

As signalled in the previous section, the needs of the younger members of the community frequently arose throughout this project. We use the phrase ‘Assyrian youth’ in reference to Assyrians aged between thirteen and twenty-five years. During the project we discussed the capacity of the community and the needs of young people with youth who were born in Australia, those who are new arrivals and those who arrived in Australia as children in the 1990s. They had a lot to say, not only about their needs in Fairfield, but also about the capacity of the Assyrian community. Overall, the youth felt that their community would need to significantly increase its capacity to adequately support and include them. This was also true for how they felt about mainstream services and government agencies in Fairfield City.

Like the broader Assyrian community, we found the post-2000 arrivals experienced minimal interaction with the young Assyrian-Australians who were born in Australia, and those who arrived in the 1990s and 1980s. Newly arrived young Assyrians have significant issues of torture and trauma related to experiences in their countries of origin and migration, which impinge upon their settlement process in Australia.

There were troubling attitudes toward new arrivals among the longer term settled Assyrian young people. These concerns extended to how new arrivals were perceived with regards to safety in Fairfield’s Central Business District (CBD) and how that could give the Assyrian community a ‘bad name’. This highlights the need for mainstream service providers to outreach Assyrian youth in general and develop appropriate intervention programs.

Despite the criticisms, among those we spoke with, there was consensus about the significance of youth to the community’s future and the role they can play. There was also a sense of sadness about the situations of some youths. Speaking at the Assyrian Community Capacity Building Forum, Paul Gorgees, the Coordinator of the Assyrian Resource Centre (ARC) highlighted the strategic role for young people: ‘I understand there are a lot of needs for the Assyrian community and I see parts of the community are already happy and well on the way ... except the youth. The gap is there. The youth are our future. If we will develop a good future it is through them.’ Similarly, Hanna Stephan, from The Assyrian Australian Academic Society (TAAAS), emphasised: ‘We do need to inspire the youth to go out there and actually do some productive work and be productive members of the Assyrian community ... They have a role and we just need to let them know that.’

An important milestone was to acquire short-term funding for a youth worker position with the AAA. The funding provides a start, but nevertheless a significant shortfall from what is needed to adequately cater to Assyrian youth in the Fairfield area. In general, it also reflects the deficit of full-time Assyrian-speaking workers for the estimated twenty thousand Assyrians living in Fairfield City. Apart from the two positions based at the ARC (generalist and youth-specific), no other Assyrian

organisations have acquired ongoing funding for community support. This is a major issue that will be returned to in the next section.

7.1 Youth perceptions of their community

The youth who participated in our study were very enthusiastic about putting their views across. They considered themselves important stakeholders in the community's future wellbeing. They are proud Assyrians. But they remain ambivalent toward their community organisations. While highlighting the strengths of the Assyrians living in Fairfield city, they were very critical and despondent about their community leaders. They seemed to have given up on their formal organisations in favour of their own expressions of patriotism and community activism.

7.1.1 Strengths

We asked youth what they considered the strengths of the Assyrian community in Fairfield City. Representative responses were:

'In the Fairfield area, Assyrians can easily go to their clubs, churches and organisations. This is important for the youth and the elderly. There are many places of worship and gathering established for community members.'

'Assyrian history, cultural traditions and language are valued within our community. The elders should encourage youth to appreciate their heritage. Assyrians are very patriotic people and are proud to display their distinct Assyrian ethnic identity.'

'There is a strong sense of community identity. Community members, especially the young ones, have a growing desire to work together.'

'There are a lot of Assyrians living in Fairfield, their presence should be positively felt in the wider community ... There is a strong desire to better Assyrian lifestyle.'

'The community values church life and is proud of its Christian faith and heritage. The Assyrian churches play an active role helping youth through church groups and Bible studies.'

'Assyrian youth have the potential to improve the community in the future.'

'There is a strong sense of moral values. Families are very important.'

'The large number of soccer clubs highlights the community enthusiasm for sport.'

'Valuing education, the community has organised tutoring for Assyrian youth through TAAAS'

The youth considered their traditions and culture as strengths and were proud of their Assyrian identity. Tied to this was a high regard for the role of the churches in the community's life. Although they may not regularly participate in church activities, many considered them of great significance. In their view, the greatest asset to them in Fairfield was the presence of their compatriots, and this was often put as a reason they liked living in the area.

7.1.2 Weaknesses

We also asked youth what they considered the weaknesses of the Assyrian community in Fairfield City. They were generous in their comments and common themes emerged, they were:

- The Assyrian community is segmented in a manner where, to a large extent, each segment works independently (political, tribal, religious). The lack of a consolidated vision and effort by segments of the Assyrian community is viewed as a major weakness that undermines greater progress whether political, social or religious.
- Tribal, political and religious factionalism within the community is seen by youth to be propagated by 'rigid old-style thinking', which highlights a cultural and generational gap between youth and the elder generation. Concerns were also expressed that factional attitudes and prejudices were being passed down 'to our kids'—something that is perceived as unfortunate and hindering the community.
- Youth mentioned that due to the issues stated above, tensions sustain internal barriers between segments of the community. This translates into a lack of projects for the youth, or lack of bipartisan support for new projects. The end result is a perception that there are no organised pathways for young people to develop their skills and experience to assume future leadership of the community.
- Without structured guidance, there is a general reluctance by youth to engage in decision-making processes in Assyrian organisations (for example, to participate as committee members).

- Even though Assyrian youth are patriotic, there is a disconnection with the finer aspects of their heritage, such as a deeper knowledge of their history, use of language (reading and writing) and competence when participating in cultural activities, which is perceived as 'disinterest' by a segment of the youth population.
- With regards to newly arrived youth, comments highlighted that there was difficulty with their integration into Australian society. Difficulty with the English language is seen as a strong barrier to accessing opportunities in Australian society, as is the relatively 'safe' interaction within the close-knit social groups of newly arrived Assyrian youth at schools and in public places.
- The experiences of torture and trauma in countries of origin have impacted upon the attitudes of Assyrians. Whether as a result of migration decades ago, or recent arrival to Australia as humanitarian entrants, the impact of pre-arrival experiences of torture and trauma have not been adequately addressed. Assyrian youth were aware of their own xenophobic attitudes towards Arabs and other Middle Eastern peoples, whom they often felt represented their people's oppressors. Tied to this, was frustration with the apparent insensitivity of mainstream agencies, who often group Assyrian youth with Arabic-speakers'.

7.2 Key issues

Having described what youth considered the strengths and weaknesses of their own community, we then asked what they considered the key issues hampering the capacity of Assyrian young people and their participation and success in Australian society. In point form, their responses were:

- English language skills: the need for programs which build upon current IEC and ACL courses to assist English language acquisition.
- Affordable and accessible recreation activities: further recreational programs are needed, especially during school holiday periods.
- Assyrian language and culture: further programs which build upon Assyrian literacy and cultural practice.
- Assyrian community engagement: Assyrian organisations need to provide youth mentoring and pathways for potential future leaders, while demonstrating a shift towards inclusive decision-making processes.
- Community solidarity: while acknowledging diversity, Assyrian organisations need to coordinate their planning for youth.
- Relations between Australian-born and newly arrived youth: there is a need to develop activities which promote assistance and positive relations.

- Isolated groups and substance abuse: preventative programs are needed which inform, educate and engage Assyrian youth (particularly newly arrived) around substance abuse.
- Australian cultural awareness: programs are needed which assist further understanding about relationships, rights and legal issues in Australian society. These programs need to also emphasise the cultural transition women and children experience in Australia.
- Unemployment, gambling and information about mainstream services: programs that increase the capacity of mainstream services and Assyrian community organisations to improve access to a variety of intensive support services.
- Employment of Assyrian Youth Workers: Mainstream services need to employ more Assyrian youth workers in a variety of culturally sensitive support services (e.g. counseling, family support and casework).

While it is not possible to discuss each of these at length here, the following sections address three key issues hampering the capacity of young people and their participation and success in Australian society.

7.2.1 English language skills

Among the major findings of the 1997 report Assyrian Youth was that English language deficiency is the major hindrance to young Assyrians gaining employment, achieving at school and becoming socially mobile in Australian society. This continues to be a major issue, as communicated by young people through the surveys conducted by this project.

For instance, Fairfield high school students considered English skills the biggest barrier they faced, and were frustrated because they could not speak English well. Most wanted to go to university but felt despondent because of what they considered the 'English language barrier' which prevented them from achieving.

English language difficulties also impact upon intercultural interactions. Again, as the high school students explained: 'We want to go out there and talk to other students and young people from other cultures but need better English'. Many young people felt they could not always mix with people from other cultures because they lacked the English skills.

Obviously, those young people with many years in Australia are not experiencing these English language difficulties. Some research participants suggested it would be good for the English-speaking youth to assist the new arrivals with English language related learning. Tied to this is the usefulness of mentoring and peer 'buddying' which can happen formally and informally. The Saturday morning TAAAS tutoring program is one example where this occurs.

7.2.2 Safety and recreation

Many youth said safety issues were a major concern to them: 'the trouble ... the fights, drugs and alcohol'. This was especially raised by young Assyrian women, as one participant put it: 'Me and my friends we feel kind of scared in Fairfield'. Tied to this is concern about drug and alcohol use among the youth, an issue common to youth culture in other communities.

Again, there is a perceived lack of support and services for the recent arrivals, especially the young males. Various young people felt that drug and alcohol prevention education is needed for new arrivals and alternative recreation activities. Some of the comments reflected a need for youth based activities and rallies, including church and sporting based activities. With the lack of such programs to engage bored Assyrian youth, the alternative use of their leisure time is typically to congregate in isolated groups—which is negatively perceived by the wider community. The need for activities is especially great during school holiday periods.

The lack of recreational options was a key finding of the 1997 Assyrian Youth study. Our study also has found that many Assyrian young people are unable to access mainstream information about recreational programs due to English language difficulties. Added to this are the costs associated with recreational activities, which are too expensive for families with large sibling groups. Consequently, young people tend to gather at each other's homes or local shopping centres (especially young men). External funding to develop the infrastructure of Assyrian organisations to cater for these needs is required, as is the allocation of resources within mainstream agencies to target Assyrian youth and make their services more accessible.

A recommendation in 1997 was the establishment of Assyrian youth groups. While the Assyrian churches have successfully expanded youth groups at the St Mary's, Sts Peter and Paul and St Zaia parishes, the recreational gap from 1997 has become more pronounced due to the increased numbers of newly arrived Assyrian young people living in Fairfield City.

As the success of these youth groups have shown, the various Assyrian churches have the legitimacy to proactively develop youth related programs. The young people who participated in our study were generally positive about churches while at the same time remaining critical of the non-religious Assyrian organisations. The efforts of Assyrian churches need to extend to targeting the young people who are most at risk and not merely those with settled family backgrounds. It needs to be highlighted that the Assyrian Australian Association, through its recent youth work funding, has embarked on a more structured planning process to address these issues and its impact will take time.

It is recommended that churches and the non-religious Assyrian organisations build partnerships with mainstream service providers, to better respond to the needs of young Assyrians living in

Fairfield City. At the same time, mainstream youth services and Assyrian organisations need to meet and begin working together. This will enable an integrated and multidimensional approach to youth development in Fairfield City.

7.2.3 Youth participation in Assyrian organisations

The following paragraph paraphrases youth specialist Ashur Isaac, who has developed an Assyrian youth plan for the Assyrian Australian Association:

Two generations of young Assyrians have grown up in Australia since the early settler years, many of whom have integrated well in Australian society. This success has also come at some cost to their community involvement. Apart from weddings, Easter and Christmas, most of these youth have had little meaningful contact with Assyrian cultural activities. Many more Assyrian youth have entered Australia with their families in recent years and are keen to make a success of their lives here, much like others who have grown up in Australia. As such, a pressing need has emerged for the Assyrian community to coordinate efforts to engage Assyrian youth and to provide them with opportunities to participate and confidently take responsibility for their future leadership of the community in Fairfield.

Isaac signals a concern expressed by young people throughout this project. Overall, there was a sense of disillusionment with Assyrian organisations among the young people. They felt excluded from their operations of Assyrian organisations. This was especially the case among the youth who have lived in Australia for more than five years, while the new arrivals were generally less critical of Assyrian organisations in Fairfield. The major Assyrian clubs (Nineveh Club, Sports and Cultural Club, and Ashur Club) were not attractive to the young people. Neither so were the Assyrian Australian Association and the two Assyrian federations.

At the same time, various young people stated they would like to participate, but not in the organisational structures as they currently operate. They considered the formal leadership of Assyrian cultural and political organisations as remaining in the hands of the first generation of Assyrian settlers in Fairfield City. Or among those with the connections and relations to community politics.

It is recommended that an integrated strategy for inclusion of young people in various organisations be developed. This would involve affirmative action or a type of positive discrimination which ensured that capable young people be given opportunities to have formal input into the development of organisational programs and priorities. This would also mean putting suitably qualified and motivated young people on organisational committees and boards of management.

8 Integrating mainstream, settlement and ethno-specific services

The preceding sections have focused upon building capacity within the Assyrian community, the discussion now turns to building the capacities of service providers in Fairfield City. In other words, how can service providers effectively play the roles of facilitators and catalysts, which support community driven efforts to build capacity? Added to this is the question of how mainstream service providers can improve access for Assyrians to participate in their programs?

A series of interviews and consultations were conducted with workers from various mainstream and settlement service providers and community members. Overall, we found that Assyrians lack equity in a range of key areas, including education, employment, housing, and health. This section suggests strategies for increasing the capacities of service providers to more effectively work with Assyrians living in Fairfield City. It also highlights the need to build interagency partnerships.

In Fairfield City there are numerous mainstream service providers. They are generalist organisations delivering services of one kind or another to residents across the LGA. These are typically not-for-profit non-government and government agencies across various sectors and fields including: community, health, families and children, housing, legal, migration, income support, information and referral, employment, education, youth, and policing. Some mainstream service providers (such as ACL) are private-sector 'for profit' businesses and their numbers will grow as governments further shift toward a competitive outputs/outcomes framework.

In comparison, the Assyrian Resource Centre (ARC), auspiced by the AAA, is the sole ethno-specific service provider working with Assyrians in Fairfield City and receives recurrent funding from DIMIA. The ARC conducts a range of programs including: services to individual migrants, post-IHSS services, referral to mainstream services, community capacity building activities, research and strategic planning, the recruitment and training of volunteers, and conducting information sessions about Australian society and services such as Centrelink, the NSW Police, and the legal system. The ARC has one generalist full-time funded position under DIMIA's Community Settlement Services Scheme (CSSS) and has recently received funding for a part-time CSSS Youth Worker.

When discussing service provision it is important to consider the contemporary policy framework for the provision of settlement services to migrant and humanitarian entrants. Underlying the framework is the principle that the 'mainstream services available to all Australians should be accessible to all migrants, including new arrivals' (DIMIA 2003:1). This principle is central to the success of Australia's multiculturalism and without access to mainstream services many migrants and refugees will not participate equitably in Australian society. Inadequate access to mainstream services disables the settlement process and hampers economic mobility, which in turn limits the capacity building of individuals and their communities.

The DIMIA (2003) *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants* details current efforts to improve the capacity of mainstream service providers to more effectively deliver services to language and cultural groups with specific needs. The emphasis is now upon ‘needs based planning’. Identified in the report are strategies for improving integration between settlement and mainstream services and for enhancing the responsiveness of mainstream agencies to recent arrivals. Overall, the key words are ‘innovation’ and flexibility’. Added to this are tighter performance and accountability frameworks for settlement service providers.

8.1 Capacity Building Forum feedback

At the Assyrian Community Capacity Building Forum we asked participants from a range of agencies what needed to be done to build the capacity of mainstream service providers working with Assyrians living in Fairfield City. The primary main theme to emerge from the Forum was that Assyrians are not adequately accessing mainstream services in the Fairfield area and that there are many gaps in provision. As one worker put it: ‘The responsiveness of mainstream agencies to Assyrians should be enhanced. Given their shared client-base, mainstream service providers and ethno-specific services should work together more and share information’.

The importance of interagency service planning, development and integration was highlighted at the Forum. Again, the following Forum comments are indicative of the emphasis upon partnerships as the way forward:

‘Partnerships need to be created between mainstream service providers that cater to Assyrians and Assyrian church-based and cultural organisations to develop and promote services in Fairfield.’

‘More relationship-building is needed by service providers. There are examples of this, such as developing volunteer work, working with Meals on Wheels and other services that implement drug and alcohol prevention programs. One of the benefits of partnerships is skills development for Assyrian workers who can then help to empower the community.’

‘Increase the networking with mainstream service providers to raise awareness of the specific needs of Assyrian clients. This should involve cultural awareness training to service providers. Such efforts would help the implementation of strategies by mainstream services to overcome barriers and increase access for clients.’

'Fairfield MRC should provide a supporting and guiding role for Assyrian community capacity building and advocacy. Not only the MRC, but other organisations should be advocating for Assyrian caseworkers. This will help build communication between the Assyrian community, mainstream and government run services.'

'There is a need for a central point of contact including awareness for families and services, and improved referral processes to support agencies.'

8.2 Barriers to mainstream service access

The findings of this project concur with the general view of the DIMIA review about the multicultural limitations of various mainstream service providers. Our consultations suggest there is a low take-up of mainstream services by Assyrians in Fairfield City. We suggest there are at least three barriers to Assyrians accessing mainstream services.

8.2.1 Deficiency of Assyrian cultural expertise

The first reason for the apparently low take-up of generalist services is that many service providers are not culturally-responsive to the particular needs of Assyrians. They lack the cultural expertise within their program delivery—a theme taken-up further in the next section. An example is the Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) which is not accessible to Assyrians because it does not have an Assyrian-speaking worker. The inaccessibility of the MRC places a further burden upon the ethno-specific Assyrian Resource Centre.

(During consultations, the Fairfield MRC acknowledged that having a bilingual worker increases the accessibility of services to any given community. However, they explained that their limited resources, and the funding environment which targets the building of infrastructure among newly emerging communities, meant a decision was made not to prioritise the provision of a bilingual Assyrian worker. However, they stated the Assyrian community made up significant numbers of their clientele.)

Our surveys suggest that there are an estimated twenty Assyrians working with mainstream service providers in the Fairfield City. However, their language skills and cultural knowledge are often underutilised.

8.2.2 Preference for ethno-specific services

The second barrier relates to the attitudes of Assyrians. In general, they prefer service delivery in their own language and by their own people. By and large, there is a deep sense of connection and a high degree of social closure among Assyrians. They are very guarded and wary of outsiders. This disposition was essential for their survival throughout the 20th Century when Assyrians faced oppression and the threat of genocide in the Middle East region. It is a pervasive survival strategy. Quite simply, Assyrians are not easily able to share their problems with those outside their close-knit community. As a result, they generally believe that problems should not be discussed openly and should be solved within the family, or by approaching relatives and churches (Assyrian) (cf. Gorgees 2003:40).

In the Australian context, such closure inhibits their successful settlement because the community alone cannot adequately deal with the problems they face (cf. Gorgees 2003:39). However, this guardedness is unlikely to change and service providers should be aware of its causes. Some workers cannot understand why Assyrians feel this way and may mistake such guardedness for rudeness or disinterest.

To help facilitate the increased participation of Assyrians in mainstream services, generalist agencies need to communicate to the Assyrian community that their needs can be sensitively and safely met within their mainstream programs. This will require partnership and liaison with groups like the Assyrian Workers Network and other Assyrian organisations.

8.2.3 Lack of integration between mainstream and ethno-specific services

The third barrier is the lack of integration across service providers. In general, mainstream service providers have not liaised and integrated with the ethno-specific ARC and vice versa. Similarly, other Assyrian organisations are not building bridges to mainstream service providers in the area. The ARC is a significant resource for mainstream services who want to strengthen their linkage with the Assyrian community. Added to this is a lack of interagency planning. To address the preceding barriers there needs to be a strengthening of the integration between mainstream, settlement and ethno-specific service providers with shared Assyrian client-bases in Fairfield City. This means sharing information and working together.

8.3 Steps to effective 'mainstreaming'

Despite the difficulties, there are examples of effective servicing to Assyrians by mainstream agencies. The Karitane Linking Families Program has successfully conducted projects targeting

Assyrian mothers and children in the Fairfield area. For instance, in 2004, they delivered community education sessions and developed resources dealing with postnatal depression. The Program Manager, Vicki Samson, described how, 'having an Assyrian worker that is quite passionate about the community is a great advantage for our organisation'. Karitane have also sought to nurture volunteers from within the Assyrian community. As she described:

We have completed a number of projects with the Assyrian community. We work with parents and children aged up to three years ... in that role we also use a lot of Assyrian volunteers and we see a lot of strengths in the community that way ... we've had people who have come and volunteered for us and built the capacity in the community that way. We have done research into volunteering and not only are the volunteers actually helping other families in the community but we have also seen a lot of other positive things ... not just in the families but also in the volunteers, and it is a way to move forward and to increase self-esteem. Often we lose a lot of our volunteers to employment as well, and we have always had the Assyrian community helping us in that volunteer role.

The Karitane Linking Families Program provides an excellent example of capacity building for both the mainstream service provider and the Assyrian community. Evidently, the key was an Assyrian worker who provided both a 'bridge' to the guarded community and cultural education to the service provider. Apparently, the program has prioritised the participation of Assyrians in project development. Again, as Vicki Samson explained: 'We had a lot of participation in the postnatal depression project ... That project was driven by the community who were saying to us, "this is what we want"'.

Karitane provides a model of an effective way to bring together Assyrians and mainstream service providers. It shows partnership between the community, the Assyrian worker and the mainstream service provider. Eventually, volunteers became involved with the mainstream organisation which built their confidence and enabled them to pass information back to the community. This in turn raised the profile of a service as accessible and reliable. The Assyrian worker at Karitane (Kardonia Daawod) is also a member of the Assyrian Workers' Network. In this way she links with other Assyrian workers and their agencies and brings these connections back to Karitane.

Volunteers are a good way to build community participation. Mainstream service providers should prioritise recruiting Assyrian volunteers and providing them with training and professional development. Assyrians are generally volunteering to help their community and other people, however, in their homeland this is not formalised. In Australia, they do not know how to become a volunteer because volunteering is formalised. So many Assyrians want to contribute and learn skills as volunteers but do not know how to proceed. An Assyrian worker within a mainstream agency can often provide the much needed link to recruit volunteers.

This project also found that it often takes an Assyrian worker to advocate internally within (or across) a mainstream service provider before staff become aware of the issues and develop a

capacity to respond to the specific needs of Assyrians.

Another example is the partnership of Fairfield Multicultural Health Service at Cabramatta Community Health Centre with the Immigrant Women's Health Service Inc.. Their collaboration has produced various health education programs for Assyrian women, such as the annual Assyrian Women's Health Information Day, the Assyrian Women Towards Healthier Lifestyle Project funded by a NSW Sports and Recreation: Building Active Communities 2003/4 grant.

Upon completion of the project a weekly two-hour Assyrian women's support group was established to build upon the social networks established and to help women utilise mainstream services. This initiative grew out of the advocacy efforts of a Multicultural Health Worker (Marlin Babakhan) employed by the Fairfield Multicultural Health Service and a member of the Assyrian community. Another partnership features the Parks Community Network (PCN) and the Cabramatta Community Centre (CCC). The PCN has a part time Assyrian-speaking worker funded by the Bilingual Welfare Service with the CCC. Again, this position grew out of the advocacy efforts of an Assyrian-speaking worker with the PCN (Armen Stephan).

8.4 The Assyrian Workers' Network

Apart from the ARC, the Assyrian Workers' Network (AWN) provides important access to the community. Established in 2001, it aims to network community, youth and health sector professionals working in partnership with Assyrian groups. The AWN brings together Assyrian workers from mainstream and ethno-specific agencies to discuss service needs and to strategically plan for projects that address specific gaps within the Assyrian community—of which the current project is one example.

Assyrian workers from Fairfield Multicultural Health Service, Karitane and the Parks Community Network have enhanced their respective agencies' service delivery to the Assyrian community as a result of their engagement with AWN. Similar benefits can also be achieved by other mainstream services that incorporate AWN attendance in the work plans of their Assyrian workers. Such steps will help to alleviate the deficiencies discussed with respect to cultural awareness, ethno-specific services development and integration between mainstream services and the Assyrian community.

9 Identity and cultural issues for service providers

Throughout the research, a common complaint by Assyrians was that mainstream service providers are delivering information and programs to them in culturally inappropriate ways. They stated a preference for the Assyrian Resource Centre (ARC) because mainstream service providers ‘... do not have Assyrian speakers’ and, as one participant put it, ‘do not understand Assyrians’. This poses serious problems as DIMIA attempts to ‘mainstream’ settlement services for migrants and humanitarian entrants by scaling-down ethno-specific service providers. Given this policy context, mainstream service providers must greatly enhance their capacity to meet the language and cultural needs of prospective Assyrian clients. Otherwise, the small AAA-aided and CSSS-funded ARC will remain overburdened with clients queuing at the door.

9.1 Identity and difference

The numbers of Assyrians living in the Fairfield LGA far exceeds other groups originating from the region referred to as the ‘Middle East’. The Assyrians are the second largest language-group residing in the area (behind the Vietnamese-speaking). Nonetheless, Assyrians variously find themselves dealing with service providers who assume they belong and identify with the broadly classified Arabic-speaking ‘Middle Eastern’ population. Consequently, Assyrians in Fairfield are being assimilated into an ‘Arabic-speaking’ framework for service planning and delivery underwritten by inaccurate generalisations about people originating from the ‘Middle East’ region, specifically Iraq.

The misrecognition of Assyrians leads to settlement problems exceeding those experienced by other minority immigrant groups. They experience great difficulty gaining culturally appropriate services and funding for their own community capacity building because there are no accurate indicators of their populations in Fairfield City. In the 2001 ABS Census indicators, the only figures available are the ‘language spoken at home’ and ‘ancestry’ categories which, as described in section 4, are of little assistance because they grossly reduce the size of the community.

The twinning of Assyrians and Arabic-speaking communities is tied to demographic profiles of the area which misrecognise the Assyrians. For instance, the Fairfield City Council’s 2004 *State of Community Report* does not differentiate Assyrians from other ‘Middle Eastern’ groups. The ‘language spoken at home’ category simply lists ‘Middle Eastern’ languages. Although it is not clear to which languages this refers. This makes Assyrians statistically ‘invisible’, despite being the second largest language-group in Fairfield LGA. Service providers use such reports in program planning. In this case, Arabic-speaking services would be highlighted because of the emphasis upon Arabic as the universal ‘Middle Eastern’ language.

The lack of recognition of Assyrians ensures they remain categorised as a ‘small’ and ‘emerging’ minority community. Which has implications for community capacity building because levels of funding and needs-based planning are largely determined by statistical representations.

Broadly speaking, ‘minorities’ may be defined as groups who are marginalised within Australian society on the basis of socially constructed markers such as race or culture. They are also groups with some degree of collective consciousness based on a belief in shared language, traditions, history and experiences. The Assyrians are often inaccurately categorised by service providers as a ‘minority within a minority’—an ethnic group within the large Arabic-speaking population.

Over the past nine years, significant numbers of Arabic-speaking Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program arrivals, and those holding Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) have settled in the Fairfield area. This growth is attributed to the arrival of Iraq-born Arabs.

Given these demographic changes, many service providers variously assume that Assyrians will be catered for in culturally appropriate ways by Arabic-speaking funded programs for ‘Middle Eastern’ background clients. For instance, the Centrelink Call Centre groups Assyrian callers with Arabic-speakers, and Fairfield Police may report Assyrian young people under the category ‘Middle Eastern appearance’.

Consultations during this research indicate that Assyrians consider it vital that they be firstly recognised by their ethnic identity and secondly by their country/ies of birth (for the majority this is Iraq). But the practice of classifying Assyrians under the banner of ‘Middle Eastern’ people is problematic because the label is synonymous with Arabic-speakers.

9.2 Misrecognition and trauma

The assimilation of Assyrians by mainstream service providers into an ‘Arabic-speaking’ client category may reactivate trauma among Assyrians as they attempt to access services. The pan-Arab movement in the Middle East has profoundly impacted upon the Assyrians. In Iraq, Assyrians are currently struggling for the establishment of a safe haven in the north of the country as they face depopulation and forced migration. Misrecognition in Fairfield may be felt by some Assyrians as a continuation of injustices suffered by their people throughout the Middle East. In this context, an Arab-background worker is not the most appropriate for an Assyrian-background client.

Various group discussions throughout the current project explored the theme of refugee flight. Although this was not a specific research focus, participants (men, women and young people) wanted to talk about their persecution by governments in Iraq, and in neighboring countries where they sought refuge. They have survived great hardships and are very sensitive to being labeled

as 'Arabic-speaking' people. Some Assyrians perceive this as an attempt to deny their cultural existence. Such fear is tied to long traditions of cultural oppression by governments within the Middle East region.

Most Assyrians (especially young men) conspicuously wear gold Christian crucifix pendants on necklaces. Assyrian icons (which were previously forbidden in Iraq) are also very popular, especially the ancient king Ashurbanipal. These physical adornments may be read as attempts to embody difference, and service providers may read them as identity markers. For instance, a client from Iraq may have an Arabic first name but wear a gold cross pendant. The worker could safely assume they are dealing with someone of Assyrian/Chaldean background.

The non-Assyrian outsider, with limited understanding of the historical dynamic and current context, may find the identity issues incomprehensible. However, service providers need to recognise the complexities of co-existence between Arabic-speaking communities and Assyrians living in the Fairfield area. There are many layers of history.

The challenge is to improve and strengthen co-existence in the local area via dialogue and recognition. Certainly, Assyrians and Arabs in the area are forming friendships and living side-by-side. However, the Assyrians consulted during this project said they are looking for more recognition by service providers. This includes recognition of past and present injustices occurring in the Middle East region.

Annual events in Fairfield like 'Assyrian Martyrs' Day' (7 August) become visible reminders of trauma and the ongoing threat posed by governments toward Assyrians in the Middle East. Recent events in Iraq have further impacted, as many Assyrians in Fairfield fear their relatives and compatriots will suffer under an Islamic-based constitution when the US-led coalition forces leave the country. Attempts have been made over the past year to bring Assyrians and Arabs with Islamic backgrounds to interfaith forums in Fairfield which promote religious harmony. For instance, in November 2004 a forum called, 'Christians and Muslims growing peace in Fairfield City' was held at the Fairfield Community Hall. A number of guest speakers shared aspects of their faith traditions and how they promote peace and resolve conflicts.

Mainstream service providers can continue such initiatives by building partnerships with the Assyrian community and Arabic-speaking communities in the area. Via such programs, they may provide opportunities for people to hear each others' stories and recognise their similarities and differences while acknowledging their current realities.

10 Additional challenges and service gaps

This section presents additional challenges and gaps in relation to service provision for Assyrians living in Fairfield City which have not been covered in preceding sections. As already highlighted, Assyrians lack access and equity in a range of key areas. The purpose here is to present, in summary form, challenging issues identified by research participants (Assyrian community members and service providers) which require attention. (The November 2005 released 'Assyrian Resource Guide' details the key service providers in the Fairfield area.)

10.1 Employment

Employment is the key to economic development and building self-reliance. Project participants said a 'good job' was most important to their success in Australia. Without stable employment, many Assyrians feel unable to begin rebuilding their lives and establishing roots in Australia. Hence, the immediate concern is employment.

Assyrians with educational qualifications arrive in Australia with high expectations about their employment prospects and opportunities to work in their profession. However, they find it very difficult to establish a pathway to employment. The lack of opportunity for those possessing overseas qualifications and skills is very frustrating. Most former professionals work in casual jobs that are menial and unrewarding. Sometimes they grieve the loss of their professions and grow despondent and cynical.

Anecdotal evidence suggests there are large numbers of young Assyrians aged over eighteen years who no longer attend school and have not worked at all in Australia, even though they may have been in the country for a few years. There appear to be few solutions to their employment problems, which include lack of experience, no recognised education and language difficulties. Most experience difficulty understanding the Australian employment and job search system and many do not access employment services because of language problems. There is a need for intensive and culturally sensitive employment training programs to help young people gain the skills and confidence necessary to secure employment.

The following quotes signal the key employment issues:

- 'There needs to be more structured job search programs for young people and adults.'
- 'People think employment is more important than looking after their health or English skills.'
- 'The language barrier and no local experience stops people from getting jobs.'
- 'People fear job interviews because they are not confident in English.'

- ‘It’s hard to get a first job, harder to get a second job.’
- ‘Those aged over forty years need training to learn new skills.’
- ‘Need to address youth unemployment and getting part-time work while studying.’
- ‘The process of recognising overseas qualifications and getting people into appropriate employment needs to speed-up.’
- ‘Refugees from Iraq can’t substantiate their qualifications because they have no papers and can’t speak English.’
- ‘Graduated people from Iraq can get their qualification recognised, but then they can’t use it because they have no work experience in Australia.’

10.2 Health

Accessing the NSW public health system is often difficult for Assyrians. There is not enough information available and more health promotion is needed. There is a great dependency upon Assyrian-speaking doctors and specialists who practice privately in the Fairfield CBD. The following responses indicate the range of issues:

- ‘Among the elderly the major health issues are heart conditions and diabetes. However, people are not readily accessing programs for these.’
- ‘There is a lack of knowledge about how the health system works.’
- ‘Health promotion needs to be greatly improved’.
- The Fairfield Liverpool Mental Health Team needs to engage in conversation with the Assyrian community.
- ‘Fear of government departments. The community will not access government departments. Even hospitals scare people.’
- ‘Access to mainstream mental health services is a problem—there are a lack of treatment options and a lot of stigma about mental health’.
- ‘Mental health services are too focused on trauma and torture. Assyrians need other mental health supports’.
- ‘Fairfield Mental Health Service needs to build better relationships with the Assyrian community to become more accessible’.
- ‘There are not enough Assyrian-speaking workers in South West Sydney Area Health Service’
- ‘We need more bilingual health professionals in public health, this will help educate the community on health issues’.

10.3 Information provision

In general, participants felt there was not enough accessible information provided about services:

- ‘There is a gap in information about Centrelink and other major service providers.’
- ‘People don’t know how to get information about services.’

- ‘Getting the wrong information from people like their family and friends.’
- ‘Multiple strategies are needed to promote existing services better.’
- ‘There is too much reliance on older settlers and on the Assyrian Australian Association for information—an overuse of stretched services and resources for new arrivals.’
- ‘Because of the lack of interpreters most new arrivals misunderstand information.’
- ‘Information is vital because services like this were not available back home [in Iraq].’
- ‘Need print format of information from different services regarding the Assyrian community.’
- ‘There needs to be a central point of contact for information about services.’

10.4 Housing

Housing is another major issue for the Assyrian community. It is very difficult to find affordable housing as rents increase throughout Fairfield LGA. Conversely, various Assyrians have over indebted themselves with huge mortgages, defaulted, and subsequently had their homes repossessed. The following quotes are indicative:

- ‘With no tenancy record, no referees, no employment and no money, it is too hard for new arrivals to find suitable private rental during their first six months in Australia. Especially the large families.’
- ‘I know of ten people living in a two bedroom unit for three months.’
- ‘Is there an Assyrian housing cooperative, managed by the community? We need one.’
- ‘Assyrians are very selective when offered a Department of Housing home, they won’t take anything that is not close to Fairfield, where they would like to live.’
- ‘Increase information to community members about housing options, types of houses, and the locations available for public housing.’

10.5 English language skills, translating and interpreting services

Language is a major issue for the Assyrian community. The experiences described in this report highlight the link between English language competency and employment status. English language difficulties were considered to be the major reason why many people are unemployed. A number of participants indicated that the English they learned through the AMEP—with a functional focus—was inadequate for employment purposes.

The difficulties with English language creates a heavy reliance upon interpreters and translators. However, there are apparently only two NAATI accredited Assyrian interpreters available in Fairfield and no translators. This limits access to vital government and community services. For example, a few non-Arabic speaking participants described instances when their Centrelink payments were delayed because there is no Assyrian telephone interpreting service for Centrelink.

Because of the non-availability of Assyrian interpreters, most people have to rely upon Arabic interpreters from one time or another. While most Assyrian are bilingual and can use such interpreters, clients may be apprehensive about their code of ethics and confidentiality. Assyrians do not easily trust interpreters from Arab communities. Underlying problems exist here because the client may feel uncomfortable discussing issues in front of Arabic-speaking interpreters whom they fear will not correctly interpret the information. The same applies for Assyrians from Turkey using a Turkish interpreter.

Some cultural concerns such as privacy and anonymity would be better addressed through the use of telephone interpreter services. However, telephone interpreting does not seem to be working well for many Assyrians, especially women. Frequently, women use untrained interpreters (often their children).

10.6 Seniors

There was general agreement that more provisions needed to be made for the ageing Assyrian population in Fairfield City. At present there are not enough support services for the elderly. Additionally, it was felt that seniors should have more input into program development.

- ‘Need social groups to help seniors access information and services.’
- ‘Our community is ageing so we need to develop and help aged care services in the area.’
- ‘If the seniors are looking after grandchildren, then they will not go out and if this is just what they do they are usually forgotten about.’
- ‘An Assyrian day care for the elderly is needed.’
- ‘Welfare workers should collect information regarding senior services and linking people up to them.’
- ‘More senior groups are needed. They are a point of contact with others and this helps in their learning about the Australian way of life.’
- ‘Psychological neglect: elderly people don’t ask for much, but inside they are crumbling.’
- ‘Tap into the potential of active seniors to run/participate in seniors’ groups.’

10.7 Education

Education is highly valued by Assyrians and was regularly cited as a key to the community’s future success. Numerous Assyrians from Iraq are highly educated (there were four universities in Iraq). The most educated are those who studied and successfully completed their courses in Iraq before the 1991 Gulf War. But amongst the recent arrivals in Fairfield there are many people whose education was interrupted by war. They are most disadvantaged and despondent about their future prospects in Australia. Growing numbers of Assyrians are commencing tertiary study in Sydney

after completing their HSC (mostly second generation). However, the majority require alternative pathways, such as bridging courses, to higher education.

Most Assyrian young people want to undertake further study to acquire Australian qualifications but are often compelled to find work. Consequently, many Assyrian students have to combine study and work in order to support their families in Australia and overseas. The transition from IEC to high school was also considered a major difficulty for many Assyrian young people. Some responses related to education were:

- 'Increase resources in schools for children with special needs.'
- 'Concentrate on educating the younger generation.'
- 'Linking community to vocational activities (advertise at schools).'
- 'ACL to teach new arrivals how to use public transport'.
- 'Expanding resources in Fairfield libraries.'
- 'School information sessions about education for parents and children together. Encourage attendance by contacting schools/churches/community organisations/ media to publicise and communicate about information sessions.'
- 'Educational programs are needed to provide information about the new society.'

11 Recommendations

Based upon the preceding discussions, this section provides twenty-three interlinked recommendations to build the capacity of the Assyrian community and service providers working with them. Underlining these proposals is the assertion that an integrated approach is required which entails various stakeholders working together. For this reason, the recommendations are grouped under stakeholder sub-sections.

11.1 Assyrian organisations (incorporated religious, cultural and sporting)

1. That Assyrian organisations further educate their members about the value of working together in partnership with other Assyrians from different groups and diversifying existing activities.

This will involve Assyrian organizations allocating resources for training around the theme of partnerships, and prioritizing work with young people who are seeking to participate in collaborative ventures. (see section 5.3)

2. That Assyrian churches develop projects in partnership with other community-based organisations/associations.

Although religious institutions, the churches have major input into the shape of the community. There are at least five different churches which are independent from each other. A key challenge is to find ways to get the churches to work with other Assyrian organisations/associations. This is vital if long term solutions are to be achieved across a range of issues impacting the community. (see section 5.2)

3. That Assyrian organisations proactively affirm the value of people who participate in their activities and contribute to the community's development.

Assyrian organisations need to implement quality management systems which encourage individuals and their initiative. This will involve establishing professional and personal development plans for members and participants.

4. That Assyrian organisations facilitate mentoring and 'buddy' programs for new arrivals.

This will develop the social fabric of the community by linking new arrivals with older migrants and Australian born-Assyrians. It will also build the capacity of the community to provide new humanitarian arrivals with the knowledge, confidence and support to participate in community life.

5. That Assyrian organisations work to strengthen cross-generational ties and create pathways for the future leadership of the Assyrian community.

This will involve recruiting, mentoring and developing selected young people for leadership.

Organisations will need to allocate seats on committees for 18-30 year olds and place 'youth' as an agenda item at regular organisational meetings. (see section 7.2.3)

6. That the current Assyrian Youth Network be supported by Assyrian organisations and be further developed through training and resourcing.

The Assyrian Youth Network provides a vehicle to link young people across the sections of the community and a forum to discuss their concerns. It also offers an important forum for the identification of future leaders and the building of partnerships. (see section 7.2.3)

7. That Assyrian organisations assist in the establishment of a commercial Assyrian newspaper to be circulated in Fairfield City.

Ideally, a weekly newspaper would include and link together the various sections of the community. It would provide an important element of the community's infrastructure. The journalistic and media production skills are available within the community. A generous auspice ('in kind' and cash) is required and a full-time media professional needed to manage the project.

11.2 Federal Government (includes DIMIA and FaCS)

8. That DIMIA fund two full-time CSSS positions to work with Assyrians in Fairfield City.

In 1984 one full time community settlement worker served a population of 4,000 newly-arrived people, now there are more than 10,000 and there remains one full time CSSS worker. Since 2001, the Assyrian Resource Centre has served face-to-face more than 5,000 clients and some 3,000 over the telephone. Two positions are needed for effective community capacity building, mainstreaming, and the delivery of settlement services to post-IHSS entrants. (see section 8)

9. That DIMIA fund the Assyrian community with a grant to develop assistance for longer-resident (post-CSSS) Assyrian migrants to establish and maintain relationships with mainstream service providers.

The Assyrian Resource Centre frequently deal with Assyrians who have resided in Australia for more than five years. Typically, they are not accessing mainstream services. A grant is needed to deliver information to this cohort which will ensure their effective mainstreaming. This will enable Assyrians to participate in the development of culturally-responsive mainstream services, and enhance their willingness to access available services.

10. That DIMIA understand that Arabic-speaking settlement workers are not appropriate for Assyrian entrants.

A common complaint by Assyrians was that settlement service providers are delivering information and programs to them in culturally inappropriate ways. This poses serious problems as DIMIA attempts to 'mainstream' settlement services for migrants and humanitarian entrants by scaling-

down ethno-specific service providers. Given this policy context, mainstream service providers must greatly enhance their capacity to meet the language and cultural needs of prospective Assyrian clients. (see section 9.2)

11. That FaCS fund a community capacity building project to work with Assyrian young people and families living in Fairfield City.

Families play a lead role in the development and sustainability of strong communities. Many Assyrian families are not coping well in Fairfield City and a great deal are in crisis—especially the post-1990 arrivals with refugee backgrounds. Family difficulties present serious challenges to community capacity building. There needs to be a project which targets the building of better family relationships and parenting skills, and further links Assyrian young people to education and training. This could be tied to a Newly Arrived Youth Support Services (NAYSS) Initiative. (see section 6)

12. That the Federal Government acknowledge the under-representation of Assyrians in the ABS Census and DIMIA Settlement Database figures and seek to more accurately count Assyrian-Australians.

The statistical under-representation of Assyrians ensures they remain categorised as a ‘small’ and ‘emerging’ minority community. Which has implications for community capacity building because levels of funding and needs-based planning are largely determined by statistical representations.

13. That the DIMIA-contracted IHSS consortium ensure that services are delivered to Assyrian Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program entrants in a culturally sensitive manner.

The assimilation of Assyrians by IHSS service providers into an ‘Arabic-speaking’ client category is culturally insensitive, especially for refugee and humanitarian entrants. Assyrians consider it vital that they be firstly recognised by their ethnic identity and secondly by their country/ies of birth (for the majority this is Iraq). (see section 9)

11.3 NSW State Government (NSW DET, SSWAHS and CRC)

14. That NSW DET employ a multicultural consultant with an Assyrian background to resource schools in Fairfield City.

Given the high numbers of Assyrian students enrolled in Public schools throughout Fairfield City, it is important that NSW DET resource schools with an Assyrian-background worker. This will also strengthen links between the schools and the Assyrian community.

15. That SSWAHS further employ Assyrian-speaking workers to ensure access to health services.

Across the Fairfield district there is only one Assyrian-speaking health worker employed by SSWAHS. Within STARTTS there is one Assyrian-speaker.

16. That the NSW CRC recruit more qualified Assyrian interpreters.

Many Assyrians reported experiencing problems accessing interpreters for specialist appointments or medical tests. There is a pressing need for more interpreters.

17. That the NSW State Government undertake a 'Youth Partnership' project with the Assyrian community.

There is a pressing need for the NSW Government to initiate a Youth Partnership with the Assyrian community in Fairfield LGA, similar in type to the currently funded Arabic-speaking and Pacific Islander Youth Partnerships. With a focus upon youth and community liaison, an inter-departmental Youth Partnership will draw in DoCS and the CRC to address family support issues impacting the community. The Assyrian churches have the potential to play a lead role in a Youth Partnership program with the Assyrian community associations and mainstream service providers. (see section 6.4)

11.4 Fairfield City Council**18. That the Fairfield City Council will use the correct title 'Assyrian' when representing the Assyrian population in their demographic reports. (see section 9.1)****19. That the Fairfield City Council will recruit Assyrians for various positions involving policy and practice in Fairfield City.**

This will address equity issues and enhance the skills development of professional Assyrians living and working in the LGA.

11.5 Mainstream service providers**20. That mainstream service providers and ethno-specific services with shared Assyrian client-bases work together more and share information.**

This is a key theme running throughout the report. The importance of interagency service planning, development and integration was highlighted. To address this there needs to be a strengthening of the integration between service providers. Assyrian-speaking workers within mainstream service providers have key liaison roles. (see section 8)

21. That mainstream service providers will incorporate into the work plans of their Assyrian employees regular attendance at Assyrian Workers' Network meetings.

The AWN is an important network of community, youth and health sector professionals working in partnership with Assyrian groups. Staff participation in the AWN will enhance agencies' service delivery to the Assyrian community. (see Section 8.4)

22. That STARTTS extend programs which link students to service providers in the Fairfield area.

The STARTTS' LiNCS program has successfully connected Fairfield IEC students to service providers in their local area. The model needs to be further developed and extended to Fairfield High School where there are large numbers of recently arrived Assyrian students who are not accessing mainstream services.

11.6 Ethno-specific service providers

23. That the Assyrian Resource Centre and the Assyrian Workers' Network provide training to mainstream service providers in relation to the delivery of linguistically and culturally appropriate services to Assyrian clients.

This will entail the presentation of 'cultural awareness' information to service providers. Ideally, a training package could be tailored to different groups with an emphasis upon social and cultural aspects. Funding will need to be obtained for this venture. Added to this is the need for networking with mainstream service providers to raise awareness about the specific needs of Assyrian clients.

Conclusion

The theme of capacity building ties together the various parts of this report. It means building a capable community by developing the skills and resources of the members of a community so that they are better able to identify, and help meet, their needs and to participate more fully in society. Capacity building is also about building citizenship by enabling people to feel like stakeholders in the wider society. Community capacity building brings together individuals' involvement and collective activity. The aim is to encourage people in a community to join together with others so as to provide what the community needs, but in such a way that those taking part also develop their individual potential as members of society.

The preceding pages have provided a thorough assessment of the capacity of the Assyrian community living in Fairfield City. Of course, any assessment of a community's capacity must be transformed into action. This is achieved through strategic planning. It is our hope that this report will spark further strategic planning and development among the Assyrian community. As stated at the outset, we have assumed the Assyrians are a resilient people with a great capacity for adaptation and innovation. This has been necessary for their own survival against centuries of oppression and hardship.

Throughout this report we have highlighted areas where there are opportunities for Assyrian groups to mobilise themselves for greater control over their lives. These include:

- improving participation;
- increasing problem solving capacities;
- developing local leadership;
- building empowering and participatory organisational structures;
- fostering partnerships across Assyrian organisations
- improving resource mobilisation;
- strengthening links to other organisations and people;
- prioritising the participation of young people; and
- creating equitable relationships with mainstream service providers.

As emphasised, service providers and community leaders need to continually to ask themselves whether a programme has helped to increase community capacity.

Apart from community leaders and organisations, this report was also written for service providers who want to know more about the Assyrians, who they are and how they are faring in Fairfield City. As described, capacity building involves making training, resources and support available to people and service providers working with them. In Fairfield City, service providers can play the roles of facilitators and catalysts by supporting Assyrian community driven efforts.

We have highlighted how categories of identification remain a significant issue impacting Assyrians in Fairfield City. Most service providers do not identify Assyrians correctly. This impacts the capacity of services to cater for the Assyrian community. As described, Assyrians are often incorrectly identified as an Arabic-speaking community and this is reflected in inaccurate statistics relating to service provision and community needs.

In many respects, we have argued that young people hold the key to the future success of the Assyrian community. This was repeated throughout our consultations with people across the community. Already, we are seeing great achievements and transformations as young people embody new expressions and articulations of what it means to be Assyrian and Australian.

References

Assyrian Australian Association 1997, *Assyrian Youth: A Survey on the Needs and Issues of Concern*, AAA, Sydney.

—1993, *Assyrians in Australia*, AAA, Sydney.

Assyrian Australian Association & Ettinger House 1997, *Settlement Issues of the Assyrian Community*, AAA, Sydney.

Beem, C. 1999, *The Necessity of Politics. Reclaiming American public life*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Cohen, D. and Prusak, L. 2001, *In Good Company. How Social Capital Makes Organizations Work*, Boston, Harvard Business School Press, Ma.

Community Relations Commission For a Multicultural NSW 2004, *Cultural Harmony. The Next Decade 2002-2012* (White Paper), New South Wales Government, Sydney South.

Deniz, F. 2000, 'Maintenance and Transformation of Ethnic Identity: the Assyrian Case', *The Assyrian Australian Academic Journal*, vol 5, pp. 42-52.

Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2003, *Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

—2004, *Australia's Support for Humanitarian Entrants 2003-04*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

Fairfield City Council 2003, *State of the Community Report*, Fairfield City Council, Wakeley.

Giorgas, D. 2000, 'Community Formation and Social Capital in Australia', paper delivered to the 7th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 25 July.

Gorgees, P. 2003, 'The Assyrian Community's Continued Needs in the Fairfield LGA', in *Checking the Pulse of Fairfield—Conference Report*, Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, Cabramatta.

Kinarah: *Twentieth Anniversary of Assyrian Australian Association* 1989, Assyrian Australian Association, Edensor Park.

Newton, K. 1997, 'Social capital and democracy', *American Behavioural Scientist*, vol. 40, no. 5, pp. 575-86.

Putnam, R 2000, *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, Simon and Schuster, New York.

Rubin, M. 2003, 'Are Kurds a pariah minority?', *Social Research*, vol. 70, no. 1, pp. 295-32.

Stewart Weeks, M. and Richardson, C. 1998, *Social Capital Stories*, Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney.

Stone, W. 2001, *Measuring Social Capital: Towards a theoretically informed measurement framework for researching social capital in family and community life*, Research Paper No. 24, February, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

Winter, I. 2000, *Towards a theorized understanding of family life and social capital*, Working paper No. 21, April, Australian Institute of family Studies, Melbourne.

Yacoub, J. 1986, *The Assyrian Question*, Alpha Graphic, Chicago.

