

Media Release

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 2016

Mahjabeen happy to be in a welcoming workplace

As one of the first Muslim employees in a workforce of 1700, Mahjabeen Ahmad is helping to bring religion and spirituality into the cultural diversity conversation.

Like the 34 per cent of ACH Group employees born in a country other than Australia, she feels welcome and respected.

ACH Group will host a morning tea to mark **Harmony Day** on **March 21**, a national day held to celebrate cultural diversity.

Mahjabeen is Project Manager of the Muslim Communities Partnership, a two-year program which aims to develop culturally appropriate aged care services for South Australia's 20,000-strong Muslim community.

Within the first week of her employment, a former meeting room was converted to a prayer room. "As a practising Muslim, I pray five times a day," she says. "This room, for me, signifies respect and recognition for my faith beliefs and practices."

Another part of Mahjabeen's role is to educate new ACH employees about the importance of cultural understanding and inclusion.

She says unfortunately, many Muslims in South Australia experience direct or indirect racism at school, at work, in the street, in public transport and elsewhere.

"Muslims are part of a community that is identified predominantly not by the language or the culture, but by faith, and in a largely secular society, this can be difficult to understand," she says. "When you talk about multiculturalism, respect and diversity, you should also include religion because you can't ignore an aspect of identity that is important to so many people."

She says although she wears a hijab, the head scarf that is a preference for most practising Muslim women, her colleagues treat her no differently to other staff.

Did you know?

- Islam is the second largest religion in the world with over 1.6 billion followers (Pew Research Centre, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population Projections for 2010-2030*, January 2011) In Australia, it is the third largest. (ABS Census 2011)
- Muslims, followers of Islam, live in more than 200 countries around the world.
- Rail links across Australia's outback and overland telegraph lines were built with the assistance of Afghan Muslims in the 1800s.
- Muslims in Australia are twice as likely to be unemployed although Muslim migrants are better educated than the average Australian. (Natasha Bitar, *Fear and Loathing on the Home Front*, *The Australian*, September 20, 2014.)
- Muslims have the highest unemployment (12.1 per cent) and the lowest participation rate (53 per cent) among all religious groups in the country. Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Australian Government, *The People of Australia: Statistics from the 2011 Census* (Canberra: 2014)
- They are also among the most economically vulnerable groups, with 36 per cent earning less than \$400 per week. Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Australian Government, *The People of Australia: Statistics from the 2011 Census* (Canberra: 2014)



About ACH Group

ACH Group is a not-for-profit aged care organisation that has been offering services to support good lives for older people in South Australia since 1952.

As well as accommodation options across Adelaide, the Fleurieu Peninsula and East Melbourne, the group offers a range of health, wellbeing, respite and support services, help at home and social activities.

Our 1700 specialist staff and hundreds of volunteers share the belief that older people should be valued and respected, connected to their communities and in control of their lives.

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