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MDAA Newsletter

February 2007

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**What's happening at MDAA
and more**

MDAA's 2006 AGM in brief

2006 was a special year for MDAA as we celebrated our 10th birthday. The AGM was a huge event, and we produced a DVD introducing MDAA, a 2007 calendar with recipes from different countries, consumers' life stories on DVD, and had a get together of new and old staff and Committee members of MDAA.

More fun came after the AGM when we had a disco. It was successful and well attended by MDAA's members, consumers and supporters. Once again it was great to see old colleagues and meet new people. We thank everyone for your continued support. We also welcome and congratulate the new Committee:

Chairperson: Milanka Zivanovic

Vice-Chair: David Abello

Treasurer: George Buxbaum

Secretary: Pusparanee Mcintosh

Members: Ace Boncato, Alberto Castillo, Clara Barton, Dulia Mandinic, Kareemaki Orake, Rajni Chandran and Tony Shoushani.

Good luck to all Committee members and thanks to the members who finished their term: Hannen Abdallah, Ilwon Park and Mirjana Metlic.

New Staff at MDAA

We also welcome new faces at MDAA:

Ather Pervaiz is the new Community Links Project Coordinator working with the African, Indian Subcontinent and Latin American Communities. Ather is from Pakistan. He will be establishing more links with ethnic

communities, to develop awareness of disability issues.

Joyce van Akkeren is the new Trainer and Community Development Worker working in MDAA's training unit. Joyce is Dutch and also speaks a bit of Indonesian. At the moment she is preparing to run cultural competence training for disability services in country areas.

We also say 'Good luck' to Elizabeth from CIWDA who is on 4 months leave. We hope to see her back again in July.



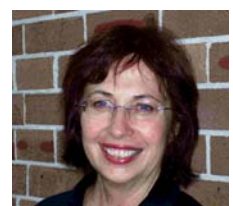
Rajni



Karee



Ather



Joyce



MDAA ELECTION GROUP

The MDAA election group came together in June 2006 to enhance the capacity of MDAA members and consumers to self-advocate and to better understand and participate in elections and political processes.

Last year MDAA organised and held a consumer forum to respond to the NSW Electoral Commissions “Equal Access to Democracy Plan” that outlines the department’s commitment to actively involve people with disability in election issues. After attending the consumer forum, a group of people felt that they would like to be more constantly involved in the upcoming NSW and Federal elections and so MDAA started supporting this new group with particular focus on disability and multicultural issues.

Since then our group educates itself about the Australian political system, visits community forums on election issues, discusses the political parties’ programs to address disability and NESB issues, meets and writes letters to politicians and MPs (Local Members of Parliament) to lobby on disability issues. The group also produced flyers and MDAA’s new election resources, like a “NSW Election” PowerPoint presentation.

In addition, individuals of the group prepared themselves to train interested community members and other stakeholders on “How to vote and how to fill out ballot papers”. On the 9th February, we successfully held our first “How to Make your Vote Count” election forum in Harris Park and look forward to educate further interested members of the NESB community in NSW.

By Robert Gruhn, Systemic and Policy Worker



How to Vote:

Make your Vote

Count on 24 March

Do I have to vote and do I enrol to vote?

Voting for State elections is compulsory (you have to do it) in Australia. If you are an Australian citizen who is over 18 years of age you have to 'enrol' (put your name on the list) to vote. If you don't have a good reason not to vote you may be fined. To enrol, go to the Post Office and get an electoral enrolment form. Fill out the form and post it to the NSW Electoral Commission, who will put your name on the Electoral Roll.

Where do I go to vote?

The nearest public school in your suburb will normally be a 'polling place' on election day. If you can't get to your local polling place you can vote at any other polling place. You then go to the table marked 'ABSENT' and tell the official where you live.

What do I have to tell the polling officials?

When you enter the polling place to vote, go to the table and tell the polling official your name and address. You can also write down your details and give it to the official who will check the electoral roll for your name. There may be interpreters present who can assist you. There may also be voting instructions in your language and you can take a friend or relative to assist you.

What is a 'Ballot Paper'?

The polling official will give you two papers listing the names of the candidates in the election. The small ballot paper is for the Legislative Assembly and the big one is for the Legislative Council.

How do I vote for the Legislative Assembly?

The Legislative Assembly is also called the 'lower house' of the NSW Parliament. The small ballot paper lists all the candidates who want to represent your district in



Parliament. You write "1" in the square next to the name of the candidate you want to represent you. If you wish, you can also choose your second, third, fourth, etc, preference by writing "2", "3", "4", etc in the squares next to the names of the other candidates. If the person you voted "1" gets less votes than the other candidates, your second or third choice could end up getting your vote.

How do I vote for the Legislative Council and what does voting 'above the line' or 'below the line' mean?

The Legislative Council is also called the 'upper house' of the NSW Parliament and its members represent the whole of NSW (not separate districts). You vote for them on the big ballot paper. There is a thick black line on the big ballot paper for the Legislative Council. You can vote above the line by writing "1" in the square for the group of candidates you want to vote for. You only need to put "1". But if you wish, you can also put "2", "3", "4" etc in the squares for the other groups of candidates above the line. If you vote below the line you *must* write the numbers from "1" to "15" in the squares next to 15 candidates in the order you prefer them. You can also put numbers from "16" onwards, but you don't have to.

What is a 'postal vote'?

If you can't get to a polling place on election day you can go the Post Office before the Election and apply to vote by mail ('postal vote'). You need to fill out the application form and send it to the State Electoral Commission in time for them to send you the ballot papers before Election day. Be early!

Being a Lebanese Muslim

I am Lebanese Muslim and just like anyone else am just a normal person but our language is different from an English person. Like other people we have different needs and different language. Our language is Arabic. Some of us talk a bit differently depending on which Arabic country we came from. We have different kinds of things we believe in such as Allah who is our god and Mohamed is our prophet. We believe in him and pray five times a day, we do fasting, give money to poor people at the month of Ramadan, go to the house of Mohamed and do the Hajj, pilgrimage to our Holy Land, Mecca.

We wear a headscarf to cover our hair so men are not allowed to see our hair and we wear long clothes to cover ourself because we don't want men to see our bodies. We cover ourselves from head to foot as it is part of our belief.

For a month during the Ramadan we fast from sunrise to sundown. After the holy month of Ramadan, we celebrate and what we do is eat most of the day, visit friends, family and have fun and give

money to the little kids and remember it is a day of celebrations and to remember our prophet Mohamed.

Lots of people believe that it is a great time because you remember that time of the year and it is a time of having fun and seeing friends and family because everyone is not around everyday to see each other, so that's why we have a great time during this holiday.

We also believe in the Koran which is a bit like the bible. Some people read it every day and some people read it only at Ramadan. This is great time of year. That is what a Lebanese Muslim is about. Just remember that we are a normal and don't judge Muslims by their look. You should judge a person by how they dress, look, and they help other people.

By Hannen Abdallah, public speaker, MDAА volunteer and a member of Australia Vision.



Major religious Days

MARCH

1	St David's Day	Christian
3	Magha Puja Day**	Buddhist
4	Holi**	Hindu
	Hola Maholla	Sikh
4-5	Purim *	Jewish
17	St Patrick's Day	Christian
19-27	Ramayana**	Hindu
21	Naw Ruz (New Year) *	Baha'i
	Norooz (The New Day)	Persian/ Zoroastrian
25	Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary	Christian
26	Khordad Sal (Birth of the prophet Zarathushtra)	Zoroastrian
27	Ramanavami **	Hindu
31	Lazarus Saturday	Orthodox Christian
	Mawlid an Nabi *	Islam

APRIL

1	Palm/Passion Sunday	Christian
2	Theravadan Buddhist New Year	Buddhist
3 -10	Pesach (Passover) *	Jewish
5	Maundy Thursday	Christian
6	Good Friday	Christian
	Holy Friday	Orthodox Christian
8	Easter	Christian
	Easter/ Pascha	Orthodox Christian
14	Baisakhi	Sikh
15	Yom HaShoah *	Jewish
21	Ridvan begins *	Baha'i

Note: * Usually begins sunset the day before; ** local customs may vary this date.

Dates and information largely obtained from the Interfaith Calendar (www.interfaithcalendar.org/2007.htm). Detailed explanations about each holy day can be found on MDAА's website on the Frequently Asked Questions page (www.mdaa.org.au)