

Women United 10 November 2014 by Stephanie Charalambous

In the wake of increased public rhetoric targeting the Muslim Australian community, local leader Lisa Price decided to reach out to Muslim women of the Latrobe Valley.

"With all the stuff that was in the media about Muslims being identified as being terrorists and stuff like that, for the (Muslim) people who live in our community, I wanted to make sure that they didn't think that our community thought that and they felt our community was supportive of them," Ms Price said.

"Fear is always built on ignorance and if we can educate the community about the Muslim culture, that should go some way to reducing any fears that the community would have."

Together, they will host an 'Understanding Scarves' event, where women of all faiths and cultural backgrounds can come together to get to know their Muslim neighbours in a casual setting.

"The fact that these women wear a head scarf doesn't make them any different from us," Ms Price said. "This is about all those things that you've always wanted to ask and find out and the women are all quite open about offering responses. What we want is people to go back and have conversations in their workplaces and their homes about what they've learnt."

United Muslim Sisters of the Latrobe Valley president Khatija Halabi said the local attitude towards Muslim women had remained largely positive.



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Nur Azrida Azhari Wasi, Val Prokopiv, Khatija Halabi, Lisa Price and Tehmina Tanveer are inviting women to come together at the 'Understanding Scarves' event this month.
photograph stephanie charalambous

Understanding why women wear the hijab

By [Jenni Henderson](#) ABC Gippsland 20 November 2014.

About 90 women from across Gippsland gathered to ask questions about Islam, eat a lunch and learn to tie their own hijab.

"If we educate and inform people about things then we can try to eliminate fear," said Khatija Halabi, president of the United Muslim Sisters of Latrobe Valley.

Even though Ms Halabi wasn't aware of any harassment of Muslim women in Gippsland, she said many women still are approached by people on the street who are curious about coverings.

She said Muslim women wear the hijab to keep with the teachings of the Islamic holy book, the Quran, and to express their devotion to their faith.

"There's an impression out there that women who wear the headscarf are oppressed and that's not the case at all," said Ms Halabi.

One of the members of the United Muslim Sisters at the event, Lisa Essler, grew up in the Latrobe Valley and chose the name Soumaya when she converted to Islam at the age of 19.

Soon after the September 11 terrorist attacks Ms Essler was living in Sydney when she said she was assaulted, hit over the head and her attacker tried to remove her headscarf.

Ms Essler said the most disturbing part of the attack was being told to get out of her own country.

"Muslims are a very diverse group and Islam is a religion not a culture. Once I was told to go back where I came from, which happens to be Traralgon," she said.



Women from various backgrounds, cultures and faiths gather at the end of the Understanding Scarves event.

One of the participants of 'Understanding Scarves' Laurel Hughes, said she enjoyed the day and appreciates the attempt by the group to educate the wider community.

However she said that when it comes to full face coverings, she disagrees that Muslim women should be allowed not to show their face to a male security officer.

"In each country you've got certain laws and when it comes to security, it's paramount, that's the way it is and stiff cheddar," said Ms Hughes.

Another participant Ann Hibert said she had a personal revelation in understanding the coverings.

She said she has always wanted Muslim women to show their hair and face, in order to be proud of their appearance, but now she realises it is their choice to reveal their body to whoever they want.

"Maybe if I think about it in those terms I can appreciate hiding your crowning glory," Ms Hibert said.



Sr Nicky Organisa saying a prayer for the children abducted by Boko Haram in Nigeria, at The Understanding Scarves Event.

Despite the atrocities that we have seen in the media recently, there have been some wonderful, positive stories that have resulted.

The Understanding Scarves event was a successful event and those who attended have requested another event where women can learn from each other's experiences.

The I'll ride with you campaign offers support to muslim females who are afraid to travel on their own.

Grade five and six pupils from St Kieren's Primary School in Moe have reached out to a Muslim school in Melbourne to promote goodwill and humanity. They wrote a personal letter to students of East Preston Islamic College (EPIC).

These students were welcomed by EPIC with the open arms of friendship, and received beautiful individual letters from them.

United sisters of Latrobe Valley first Annual General Meeting by Arfa S. Khan

Any organization small or big, old or new has to go through the process of election to elect their representative for the next year. For this very reason Annual General Meeting is a mandatory and legal process. It is an important event for any organization to clearly communicate to its members about its performance. The outgoing committee presents its financial report, performance and reinforces on its purpose on the day. The report is finally submitted to the government.

It is also the time to revitalize the organization through the official engagement of members into key elected positions. So keeping these points in perspective, The United Muslim Sisters of Latrobe Valley (UMSLV) held their first Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Monday 3rd November 2014 and elected its new representative for the year 2015.

The AGM was formally started with the verse from Holy Quran, Khatijia Halabi president for 2013-2014 spoke about the overall performance of the committee, Treasurer, Syeda Hussaini presented the annual financial report while Secretary Yumna Ahmed talked about the activities undertaken during the previous year. The AGM was held at Gippsland Multicultural Services (GMS) community room, Morwell. Merisha Dobrie Grbic employed at GMS chaired the meeting to keep the election process transparent.

The new committee for the year 2015 has been elected as follows;

President: Khatija Halabi

Vice-President: Nur Azrida Azhari Wasi(Ida)

Secretary: Yumna Ahmed

Treasurer: Syeda Amatullah Husaini(Lubna)

Executive members: Arfa S khan , Zeinab Badereddine

Co-opted Comitte members: Nahla Nabulsi, Farhat Zafar, Lisa Essler(Soumaya)

The new committee has taken up its duties with full zeal and vigour to serve its community. The new committee is open to any suggestions on how their work can be improved, as well as ideas for activities and events. Please feel free to contact the new committee about any concerns or suggestions.

In the end, we congratulate the new committee for taking up the task and thank the ongoing committee on its wonderful work for organizing successful events and to assist the already harmonious community become an even stronger one, Inshallah.

Upcoming Events

School holiday Program

Day	Date	Activity	Time	Venue	Cost
Monday	19 January 2015	Cooking activity	11 30am to 1pm	GMS Community Room, Morwell	No charge
Tuesday	20 January 2015	Kite making		Traralgon Library	\$5 Book through Latrobe City Library
Wednesday	21 January 2015	Craft activity	2 to 3.30pm	GMS Community Room, Morwell	No charge
Thursday	22 January 2015	Free play	1 to 3pm	Morwell Town Commons.	No charge
Tuesday to Thursday	20/01 to 22/01	Gymnastics	9.30am to 12pm	Morwell Academy of Gymnastics	\$90 for all 3 days or \$35 per day.

Community Event

Gippsland Australian Muslim Community Inc. (GAMCI)

Will be holding an event to commemorate the life of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). and to make dua for the recovery of Hayyan Ahmed.

Venue: Student Union Lounge, Federation University.

Date: Saturday 31 January 2015

Time: 5.30pm

Dinner will be provided, although a plate of sweets, salad and/or drinks is humbly requested.

For more information please e-mail gamci@hotmail.com



Founder of World Hijab Day, Nazma Khan's story

Nazma moved with her family from Bangladesh to America when she was eleven years old and could not speak English.

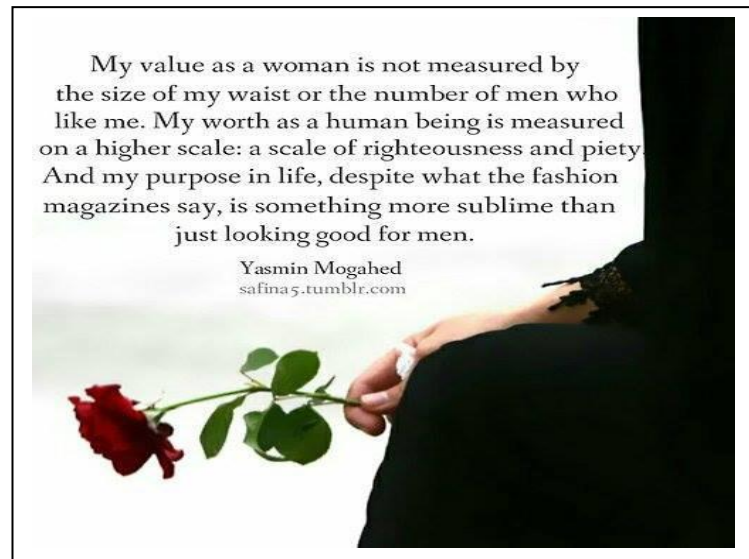
She wore a headscarf to obey her Creator and to make a statement about her identity as a young muslim woman. She had no idea that a piece of fabric would cause her so much pain over the next several years.

She faced constant discrimination throughout school, was verbally and physically attacked by her school peers and teachers. She could have dropped out of school but instead graduated top of her class! She attended college in New York after the 9/11 attacks and constantly lived in fear.

She started a business to offer a support system to muslim women where they could share their stories. She received many e-mails from women around the world. She could relate to these women and sympathise with them. It was from here that she got the idea to start World Hijab Day. A day after launching her website and facebook fan page where she invited muslim and non-muslim women to participate in WHD on 1 Feb, so they can walk in the shoes of a hijabi, she received responses from 67 countries!

She believes it is only through tolerance and acceptance that we can co-exist peacefully.

Better awareness, greater understanding, peaceful world!



“A day in the life of a Hijabi: On February 1st, 2015, we invite both Muslim (non-hijabi) and Non-Muslim women to participate in a worldwide event by wearing Hijab for a day (wherever you're at). This is our 3rd annual World Hijab Day and we'd like 1 million participants.” (Nazma Khan).

More info: <http://www.worldhijabday.com/>

Founder: Nazma Khan

For those who would like to participate and share their photo please send it to Khatija (k.umslv@yahoo.com.au) on facebook or e-mail and I will upload it onto umslv's facebook page.

“World Hijab Day is not an act of worship but rather an effective way to create global awareness of the issue that is being attacked unfairly. It has achieved some great success already. Alhamdulillah.”-Mufti Ismail Menk

Syeda Kainat's Hijab story (Pakistan)

Some People belief that Muslim women are forced to wear hijab. For the vast majority of Muslim women, nothing could be farther from the truth. Indeed, deciding finally to wear hijab is often difficult. Days of meditation, fear of negative consequences and reactions from family and/or the wider society, and ultimately, the need for plenty of courage weigh heavily in reaching the decision.

Wearing the hijab is a very personal and independent decision, coming from appreciating the wisdom underlying Allah's command and a sincere wish to please Him. For me, leading up to the decision to wear hijab was easy. I found that, Alhamdulillah (praise be to God), although I did receive negative comments from people, I appreciated the feeling of modesty wearing the Hijab gave me, and ironically, the negative attention made me feel more proud to be identified as a Muslim.

To me Hijab is a gift from Allah that saves you from evil eyes and evil intentions. Hijab is not merely just covering, but more importantly, it is in behavior, in manners, in speech and appearance in public. This was the important reason I decided to wear Hijab at my workplace, university, bazaars, etc. For some people, the headscarf is an outer manifestation of an inner commitment to worshipping Allah. It symbolizes a commitment to piety. Self or inner morality is what gives meaning to the external scarf. But this can not be perceived for all the ISLAMIC WOMEN. Indeed a women who is not wearing hijab permanently doesn't mean she is not pious and religious or close to ALLAH. How she acts, dresses, speaks, and so on, shows that she is a good human being and a Muslimah.

When I walk alone or far away from home, I do wear Hijab and keep my self covered in all aspects, but when I am with my family I feel safe and liberal. I am proud of myself because I know where I have to cover myself and not to show off to impress people without any reason. May Allah guide me to the right path, Ameen. In a land where misinformation about Islam and Muslims in abundance, Muslim sisters have the opportunity to portray Islam in its true light (by having hijab days).”
Syeda Kainat - Pakistan



A participant at The Understanding Scarves event learning to tie a headscarf.

Adrienne Anne Hickman

I am a Christian minister in America. Although I don't always wear hijab, often times I do in prayer/dua, in daily routine, and even in church!!! God sent me many beautiful Muslim friends. Really, I cannot imagine my life without them. They have been there for me in good times and bad. Some Christians have taken issue with me about this matter but they are not God. My God says it is good. So I tell them that if they don't like it too bad. Hehe

There is so much hypocrisy in all the Christian movies of the Old-testament and the Gospel. The women wear them. Mary, mother of Jesus is always presented wearing a hijab in our Christian paintings. The Catholic nuns wear them. African women wear head dresses. In many Christian churches, women wear head coverings before entering to worship. It is their belief according to the way they interpret the scriptures in the Gospel!!!

Christian women in many parts of the world wear them and yet they have the audacity to criticize a Muslimah (Muslim woman) for her hijab!!! Too many Christians are singling out the Muslims and just picking on them. Well, me and many of my Christian friends know the meaning of fairness & respect. I will preach it 'till the day I die!!! I dedicate this to all my Muslim friends...Alhamdulillah!!! - Adrienne Anne Hickman