

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Early Childhood Engagement of CALD Communities

Ballarat East—Thursday, 21 November 2019

MEMBERS

Ms Natalie Suleyman—Chair

Mr James Newbury—Deputy Chair

Ms Christine Couzens

Ms Emma Kealy

Ms Michaela Settle

Mr David Southwick

Mr Meng Heang Tak

WITNESSES

Ms Abrar Dham,

Ms Susan Dallas, and

Ms Deruka Dekuek, Migration and Settlement Coordinator, Ballarat Regional
Multicultural Council.

The CHAIR: Good afternoon. Thank you for being here. I welcome you here to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's Inquiry into Early Childhood Engagement of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities. Can you please state your name for the record?

Ms DHAM: Abrar Dham.

Ms DALLAS: Hi, I am Susan Dallas.

The CHAIR: Thank you, and you are from the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council. All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege; therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat some things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check as soon as it is available. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and any handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible.

I now invite you to make an opening statement of 5 to 10 minutes, which will be then followed by some questions from the Committee.

Ms DHAM: Hi, my name is Abrar. I am originally from Kuwait. I migrated to Australia almost 10 years ago. I lived in Melbourne pretty much that whole time, and I just moved to Ballarat about 10 months ago. I started a family almost seven years ago now, and my first contact that had anything to do with early childhood services was with my maternal health nurse. She was my link pretty much to all the services that are related to children's services. She was great. Not only did she have the knowledge in her field but I just felt I could relate to her as a person. She was not—I do not know if it is the right thing to say—judgemental in any way. She had understanding of cultural awareness, and so she was able to refer me to a lot of services that could benefit me and my family, being from an Arabic community.

I was diagnosed with postnatal depression, and so she was able to refer me to a service that is entirely just for Arabic speakers in the community. That was back in Melbourne in the Arabic community. For mums who got postnatal depression there was a whole variety of programs, and they were offering free transport and obviously free services, whether it was playgroup or community events et cetera. Also there is a library that is connected to the council. I came from Hume City Council—the northern suburbs—and predominantly in the community there were Arabic community speakers and Turkish and Indians. So they had a lot of programs that are for these community groups, so there were the Arabic story times, Turkish story times. There was also celebration of different festivals for Muslim communities, Christian communities, Jewish communities. That was one thing. I am just going to look at my notes quickly because I have a few things to say.

So then my girls grew up and it was that stage where I had to look for a playgroup for them. They just needed more at that stage. Story time was not enough for them so I started looking for a playgroup. It was one of those things—I could not find the right playgroup for my family and for my children. Whether it was within the Arabic community or not, there was not anything there for me that speaks to me, that is related to my values, so I actually started running my own playgroup from home. I opened it to the community, so again I had this diverse community coming to my house for playgroup. We did craft together, baked together, sang songs, and we did our own celebration from my home.

That moves me to this I guess this year, well end of last year, we moved to Ballarat. My eldest now is in prep and my youngest is in kinder. I guess that is now, as far as my engagement with the early childhood services—my daughter is going to kinder and I actually started working this year in childcare services in Ballarat.

I feel there is something—I don't know. Some educators struggle, or they do not put in enough time to know more about children from different cultural backgrounds. They do not have that awareness of certain maybe habits, traditions, rituals. So many events happen this year whether it is Chinese New Year, Indian Diwali, Muslim celebrations—two celebrations this year so far—and there was not any acknowledgement for that. I understand being in Ballarat, it is not like Melbourne where it is very diverse, like it is everywhere. But I feel children therefore, they see those children from different cultural backgrounds, I guess, differently. They cannot relate to them. They do not talk to them because, 'They look different, we're not going to talk to them'.

But that is my experience from my work. I just feel there is a lot that needs to be done as far as educating children and educators themselves about children from different cultural backgrounds. As I said, I was lucky enough to have one of the best maternal health nurses. She had that cultural awareness and I did not feel belittled, or I did not feel the pressure, 'You need to fit in in the community'. It was rather like, 'Let's empower you, find your tribe, find your community and then you can give back to the people around you'.

But I do not feel that is being done at my work. Even like with personal development, training—we do all sorts of training but no-one is touching on the cultural side of things at all. Whether it is training how can we be more culturally aware and sensitive with people, certain things are inappropriate to say to someone because—

I can use the example for myself; I am from a Muslim background and I dress quite modestly, long sleeves et cetera, and I always get asked this question, 'Do you feel hot?'. And I am like, 'Well, it is a hot day today, I think everyone is feeling hot so why would I feel any hotter than anyone else?'. Just certain comments like that, I feel if people had more of that cultural awareness, they would realise it is actually not appropriate. I cannot stop people asking, 'Why you are wearing things a certain way, why you are wearing things differently to me?' and all of that. I guess it is just education, education, education, for both educators and children.

Ms DALLAS: And families.

Ms DHAM: And families, yes, exactly that. I probably passed my 10 minutes. I can keep going on and on about it, but I will just stop right here.

Ms DALLAS: Hi, my name is Susan and I am from Nepal. I came to this country around seven years ago by boat—2012, 17 July—and at that time I did not have any kids, so I just realised that I need kids now, I cannot survive without any kids. So I just decided to have a baby, and my wonderful son was born inside the detention centre. After he was born, the government changed the rules. They said that our kids needed to go outside from detention, so luckily I was out from the detention centre when I had my big son. But after all the trauma and anxiety, I went through depression, then I went to the mother and baby ward for six weeks. From there I met really nice nurses and doctors, and then they encouraged me that, 'You are still good', 'You can do it'. So I just felt like I can do it. From all of the midwives' and nurses' and doctors' help, I just felt I would do it.

Then I started studying early childhood, so I am nearly finishing my cert III now and I am going to do the diploma also. So exactly the same as what Abrar is saying—that society needs to change their eyes, like their points of view about the different cultures and backgrounds of people. I have the same problem working with my colleagues, working with little children. Like, one of the little children was asking me, 'Please can you not sit next to me; I am scared of you', and I just do not want to blame that child because he does not know about different background people. That is only the problem of family, because maybe the child never had that opportunity to meet with different background or cultural people. So it is just only those things that Ballarat has to change. It is not like Melbourne; Melbourne has lots of diverse and different cultural people, but Ballarat is still a little bit backward.

So in my opinion I cannot change for someone; someone needs to change for me. Like they need to change their eyes. We are the same. If I love a black child, I can love a white child also. I have the same eyes for all children, so still I have a passion to look after the kids. I still want to do more study in this field. That is it from my side, thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, that is wonderful. Did you want to add anything further?

Ms DHAM: No, I will stop right here.

The CHAIR: No? That is okay, we will go into the questions. Thank you very much for presenting.

Ms DHAM: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I just had a question. You spoke about the City of Hume, and where I represent I am actually in the City of Brimbank, which is very close to the City of Hume. My question is: what made you move from the City of Hume to Ballarat?

Ms DHAM: Tree change, that was one. When I started shopping for schools for my children, I could not find anything that was suitable for my children. My husband went to a Steiner school himself, which is an alternative school. I visited the Steiner school myself. I went to Montessori schools. I did all the shopping myself, and I found a Steiner school was something more suitable for us. Even at a Muslim school there are things I do not necessarily agree with. It is one of those things, I guess it is a personal thing like whether you are spiritual or not, religious or not. I think it has to come from the person within and their relationship with whatever you want to call it—God, the universe, the lights, et cetera. I found with the Steiner school it is a more accepting community that would accept people from all different backgrounds. They do not necessarily want you to conform to such things as to be a better Muslim, a better Christian, a better Jew. So I felt there was more of a freedom there. For us to move to the country—I could not afford a Steiner school in Melbourne, so the cheapest Steiner school in Victoria is the one in Ballarat. We are just 2 minutes away from the school, so that was the biggest factor for us to move.

Otherwise, I still miss the community there in Hume. I created all this friendship, like they became a family and then I had to leave that behind. It is like migrating again from Melbourne to a completely different place, but yes, I got embraced by the Steiner community here. So I do not feel that homesickness, I guess. But yes, that was a key factor for us—just the girls' education and where did I actually want them to be. As I said, because I want them to be in a Steiner school, I would not have been able to afford houses near a Steiner school in Melbourne or the Steiner school itself in Melbourne.

The CHAIR: You spoke about the educators needing education and far more cultural awareness, starting with the educators. How do you feel about your local council as well? Because you spoke about the festivals not being acknowledged this year so there seems to be a gap in the cultural awareness of probably one of the most basic things for council. What are some of the suggestions that you would put forward to the council to improve cultural awareness in this community?

Ms DHAM: I guess it has to come from the people, and I do not know what the population is here as far as Muslim people or Arabic-speaking people here. Maybe there are not many for them to actually push forward and actually go to council and say, 'Hey, we've got an event coming up here. Can we promote it through the council services?'. Maybe there are not enough people that are pushing it as well. It is hard to come from the council as well if there are not any Muslim people on the council. Like Hume City Council, there were some Muslim people to fund certain projects or community events et cetera. I did not find out about the multicultural council here; it was just word of mouth. I was catching the bus and I started talking and this lady from a Muslim background, she was like, 'You need to go to the multicultural council'. I do not think I have seen flyers or posters in the library in Ballarat, or even when I came to Ballarat in my welcome pack there was nothing about the multicultural council. They could see obviously I am new. How long I have been here in Australia they do not know, but I look different. Maybe something like that just to—

Ms DALLAS: That is true. She is saying there is not any welcome from the multicultural council. That is true because I am under the government settlement things but nobody is coming and asking about how you are doing, what you are doing, do you need any help, things like that. I do not have any support from that also, but I just try to dig and find out where is the multicultural centre and I try to continue to come here and knocking the people, 'Look, I have this situation, I need help'. But I think lots of people do not know about the centre and where to go and where to ask for help like that.

Ms DHAM: As I said, because I have that link to my maternal health nurse, who obviously was aware of all the services happening in the Hume area, so she was able to support me with that and refer me to different places. Now my kids are obviously grown up so I do not have anything to do with a maternal health nurse so

the only thing that I have contact with is the school itself, which I am happy with because they are diverse within their own community. But the times I go to the library there is nothing about multicultural events.

I was not even aware there was the Ballarat interfaith network. Like they do not actually have a website or a Facebook page at all, so I actually joined their committee recently because I am like, 'Hey. What's going on here? I think we need better promotion here for the network'. So, yes, I think it is just a lack of promotion for services like that, especially now that Ballarat is growing. Ballarat 10 years ago—I was not here 10 years ago, but from what I have heard it is very different and I feel like there are more people coming from Melbourne, people coming from Sydney from different cultural backgrounds and they are probably coming for the same reason—tree change, somewhere that is affordable—and yes, I guess embracing all these peoples.

Ms COUZENS: Thank you so much for coming along today. We really appreciate it. It is always much more interesting I suppose to hear from people with lived experience rather than all the organisations. Thank you so much for making the time to come today. We really appreciate it.

Ms DHAM: Thank you.

Ms COUZENS: And it is interesting to hear you talk about the library service, because they have been here today talking about the services they offer.

Ms DHAM: Oops.

Ms COUZENS: So it is interesting to hear from your perspective that you were not given the information that they have there, and they have multicultural ambassadors as well. So it might be worth exploring—

Ms DALLAS: I didn't know.

Ms DHAM: This is all new. We were saying we don't know.

Ms COUZENS: And I suppose for me, the issue around the workforce in communities like Ballarat—and I understand there is a small population of multicultural communities here, particularly in the humanitarian side of things as well—do you see an importance in having more multicultural people employed in some of those key areas around health, education, settlement, those sorts of support services?

Ms DHAM: Absolutely, because people then can relate. Like obviously I have got only maybe three children in my class at my work who are from Indian or Pakistani background, and just the assumption—because I have the same skin colour educators tell me, 'Can you talk to them? They understand you'. I'm like, 'They're Indian, I'm Arabic; we do not have the same language'. But yes, I think making it more of the norm when there are people from different cultural backgrounds in those areas and those fields, slowly I guess people are going to have that awareness and understanding of different cultures and actually get to know us better.

Ms DALLAS: I think they have to make differences in early childhood also. They need to employ at least one or two educators from different backgrounds. Where I was for my placement they just do not like me, and then I asked the question because I am a little bit chatty, a little bit of a chatterbox. I said, 'Why don't you have any educator from a different background?', and they said, 'Oh, somehow we don't have', and then I asked, 'Why don't you have anybody, like any child from any different background?', and they said, 'We don't have any'. That is why the child is scared of me, because he has never seen any educator from a different background also. So it is not only the family; the child care also needs to move a little bit forward, like hiring some people from different backgrounds, maybe Aboriginal, maybe Chinese, maybe from India—any of the different background educators they need to hire, I think.

Ms DHAM: I was actually told this recently. I do the Stepping Stones program here at the multicultural council. The women there are mainly from different cultural backgrounds, and I was told that two of them, because of their English, could not do the course of early childhood services. They actually got rejected to do their certificate in early years childhood services because their English was not good enough to take on the course. So there are people in the community who want to be out there for the service—for children and those communities—but yes, it is one of those things. People get knocked down just because of English rather than looking at, 'How can we support that person to actually take on the course and how can we help them

throughout this process?'. Because people have got passion. It is not like we are coming with—like, I came from an educational background, and still people to this day always assume that I cannot speak English.

Ms COUZENS: So is it the local TAFE that runs those courses?

Ms DHAM: Yes.

Ms COUZENS: And is there a promotion of those as a pathway for multicultural communities to, say, do child care or—

Ms DHAM: I have done my course in Melbourne. They were able to promote their courses in the Arabic communities group—Turkish, Arabic—and they actually had people, they had an Arabic representative, coming to our playgroup to promote the course for the Arabic speakers. The Turkish community had a Turkish representative. Whether it was from the council or it was from the course provider themselves, they actually had a representative from each community group coming to promote the course. So that is where I felt like, 'Okay, I feel comfortable getting in and I will be able to do the work' because they were very approachable. They told me what I am entitled to do and what I need to do to pass my course et cetera. But here in Ballarat obviously I am not doing any studies as far as early years of childhood. I am doing my Steiner teacher training, which I guess is a bit different. But I do not feel there is an opportunity out there. It is not promoted properly for people from a different cultural background.

Ms COUZENS: And how do you think that can change in a city like Ballarat, for example?

Ms DHAM: I mean, Ballarat is growing. I guess take advantage of the people who are coming from a different cultural background and just enrich the community, and do not be afraid to employ us. I guess having more people as representatives in council from different cultural backgrounds would be helpful. It will just make it even more diverse, and people will feel they can relate to the people working there rather than, 'Oh, it's the council'. Again, coming from Kuwait, it is back to that education of cultural awareness. I came from Kuwait. I was not allowed to go to council without someone they know in council. It is a red line you cannot cross. You cannot just go to council and call people by their first name. That is something I am still learning. I would feel very bad if I called you Natalie when I should be calling you Ms Suleyman. That was the way in Kuwait. A lot of the people, like refugees—I do not know what it was like in Nepal—get scared going to these places like council, but if they see there is someone they can relate to, a brown-skinned person in there, maybe they will feel like, 'Actually, I can go there. They will understand me. I won't be judged'.

Ms DALLAS: That is how I made new friends. I really have lots of friends from Australia and New Zealand, lots of people from English backgrounds. But I am really scared in my workplace going and talking to other colleagues who are from Australia. That is how I am just knocking and digging a couple of friends with brown skin because I feel comfortable to talk to them. I feel comfortable with you guys also, but they do not feel comfortable with me. That is the difference in the workplace. But still we are trying and pushing ourselves. We are doing it, but it is really hard to work in that area.

Ms COUZENS: So that multicultural training is really important across the board really, isn't it?

Ms DALLAS: It is, really.

Ms DHAM: Like we have had some training just about child protection, child safety, how to talk to parents and relationships with parents, but no-one spoke about cultural awareness. Any childcare centre now that you go to has got the poster about the Aboriginals. How much do you actually implement that in the program? I am not a team leader necessarily. I am a casual educator at the centre that I am working at. I teach them Arabic songs every now and then. I come with something different. I tell them where I actually came from because I get asked a lot about my headpiece—'Why are you wearing it? What's in there? Where's your head, where are your ears?'. Just making it normal—'It's okay. I've got my ears; they're just hiding there. I've got my stories hiding in the turban'. They are like, 'Oh, share some stories with us'. So all of a sudden it is not something scary. But I feel like childcare centres have these posters—'We acknowledge Aboriginals are the traditional owners of the land'—but even that, the history of the Aboriginals, is not brought up in the curriculum at all.

Ms DALLAS: That is only in the policy and procedures.

Ms DHAM: It is only in the policies and procedures.

Ms DALLAS: They aren't implemented anywhere.

Ms DHAM: It is not being implemented. Again I do not know whether this is coming from the owner of the centre herself and she needs to be more trained, educated, in this kind of stuff. Again, I totally understand Ballarat is different to Melbourne. Melbourne is a very diverse town, so I do not expect Ballarat to be the same, but we can all see that Ballarat is growing and there are more people coming from all over the place. I think more work in that area would be great

Ms COUZENS: Great. Thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Just at this point we have had an arrival from Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council. If you just want to state a name for the record.

Ms DEKUEK: My name is Deruka Duke. I am from Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council. I am the settlement worker. My apologies for running late. Ann Foley is an apology as well.

The CHAIR: Did you just want to just contribute or say a few—

Ms DEKUEK: I just want to add something onto that point. I believe that Ballarat is doing a lot of positive things. It is going out to the regions—further out. Two months ago we got a phone call from the Ararat early childhood centre to do cultural competency training, and my colleague and I went and delivered the training. Some of the things that we did mention most of the workers were not aware of, and they were like, 'Wow! It's really vital to learn all these things'. There had been that assumption, but we allowed people to learn and to cross cultures. It is very important, yes.

Mr TAK: Susan, Abrar and Deruka, can I just say that for 10 years here and seven years here your English is marvellous. Maybe females study English faster than males! And I totally agree with you in terms of cultural awareness. I remember clearly—and then I will come to my question—that at the language centre my language school teacher asked, 'Do you play football?'. I said, 'Yes. Why not? I'm very good at it'. And then I went outside my classroom, and it was not 'football'; it was this shape. So it is cultural understanding.

Now, coming to this centre, to Ballarat, with your wealth of life experience, what do you think can make the multi-CALD community feel they belong and feel welcome? What sort of things do you see that can be improved?

Ms DEKUEK: I would like to take the floor on that. With our current database, we have got 25 community associations, and those 25 community associations have events that they are involved in. One of the events is the begonia parade—we have the meeting tonight. The begonia parade is a yearly event at Lake Wendouree. Over 500 people come from all over the region and celebrate the diversity of our cultures. There are other things we have got—the INTERKULTURA soccer tournament was a few weeks ago. We had about 12 teams from Shepparton, Bendigo, Greater Dandenong and all the regions. I think it is a way of bringing all the cultures and all the communities together and saying, 'This is what we are doing, and we are here to share our wealth and our richness and celebrate our cultural practices'.

Mr TAK: I see. In terms of getting information to the community groups and to the families, in what form would it be? In printed media, in the local paper, or on social media—digital media?

Ms DEKUEK: What has been working quite well lately is social media like Facebook. I do advertising for events. But at the end of the day not everyone has got the ability or capacity to be able to open Facebook to see what is going on. We advertise events around the building. Sometimes we call and let them know this is happening. We call the community associations' leaders to be involved.

Ms DHAM: I was just going to say this one thing. I do not want to keep talking about Hume City Council, because I am not at Hume anymore, but one thing they used to do is they used to have a big banner for every celebration—so for Muslims, 'Happy Eid'—at the council, which everyone could see. At Christmas time, it was 'Merry Christmas'. I am sure Ballarat would do the same thing. For every celebration they would actually

have a banner for each community group. Sometimes they would have it in Turkish; sometimes they would have it actually said in Arabic. That is a big statement coming from the council itself—so it is not just coming from the community group itself; it is actually coming from the council itself. That shows how they are actually embracing the people and the community.

Ms DALLAS: Yes, and I think in Ballarat, from Nepal and India there are a large number of people living here, so how about we celebrate the big Nepalese festivals? I think in India Diwali is a big festival, but in our country Dussehra is a big festival. So I have nearly 50 people from my country and they really want to register the Nepalese community also here. They feel really sad that nobody is talking about and celebrating their festival—Dussehra. It just passed I think two months ago, and they feel sad. They come from Sydney, they come from Darwin, they come from many other places, but here there is not any celebration and nothing happening to them also.

Ms DEKUEK: Yes, and another point that I wanted to add—it was a few weeks ago, Susan—was we had the cultural parade. It was an event showing all the cultures, traditional dresses, and it was really fantastic. Even the young kids were connecting to their own culture. It was a diverse event.

Ms COUZENS: I just had a question about settlement services—whether from your view they are adequately resourced and what sort of supports you are able to provide to people moving into the region.

Ms DEKUEK: Well, when it comes to settlement services there are always challenges at the end of the day. We know the elephant in the room, and that is the lack of resources. So with my program I work with the newly arrived, so from their first arrival to five years. After the five-year period someone would exit the program, but literally after five years; there are people who have been here 10 years and still they are struggling, but we tell them, ‘Okay, your five years is over, so you can move on’. So I think we are not doing enough. At the end of the day we need to come down to see where the gaps are, and the gaps are the resources. On the other hand, working with asylum seekers—I do not work with them, but at the end of the day they consume my time. Someone would come and say, ‘Deruka, I need some help with housing, I need some help filling in the form’, but they are not—

Ms COUZENS: So you are not funded to assist asylum seekers?

Ms DEKUEK: No, there is no funding.

Ms COUZENS: Refugees?

Ms DEKUEK: Only refugees and migrants. So at the end of the day all my energy is stretched across.

Ms COUZENS: So how many would you be working with at any one time?

Ms DEKUEK: At any one time—you would expect it to depend on the day and the case—you see four to five a day. So now, as I was running late, I had a group of eight people that I was running, so I took them swimming.

Ms COUZENS: And are there any multicultural playgroups and kindergartens that you can direct families to for that early childhood support?

Ms DEKUEK: Well, there is nothing that I am aware of here. Some of the early childhood centres that I have been to, they are trying to build a relationship whereby a parent can bring their children in, feel welcome and feel that, ‘Okay, this is a home or a second place that I can bring my child and have that peace of mind at the end of the day. I will not worry; my child is being looked after’. But there is nothing. So if we could model some services mostly employing people from cultural backgrounds in childcare centres or in early childhood centres, it would mean a lot.

Ms COUZENS: So we talked earlier before you got here around the workforce and encouraging people from multicultural backgrounds into employment or training opportunities and how we might best do that.

Ms DEKUEK: It has been a big issue that has been discussed. For example, I believe that you are aware of the family day care fraud. The family day care fraud has affected a lot of people from CALD communities, being given fake certificates, fake diplomas that they have not attended the class for. At the end of the day they cannot even fill in a form when they want to apply for a job. So this is the question: how can we compensate them or how can we take them back and train them? We know very well with the government system that once you have got a higher level diploma, you cannot repeat the diploma anymore. It will not be government funded. You have to pull the money out from your pocket. We know that these people are vulnerable. They do not have the financial capacity. So the question is: how can we help them? Where can they get the extra resources to redo their course in the actual accredited area?

Ms COUZENS: So if you did have the resources to provide services for families in the early childhood area, what would the priorities be? Obviously the workforce is one of those, but what are some of the other things that you think are really important?

Ms DEKUEK: I believe you. We have the resources. There are traineeships and apprenticeships. That would be a good model—someone to learn while they are doing the job. Bear with the grammar, bear with the English—at the end of the day, you put in that training accompanying while you are giving them their job, so I think it will work really well.

Ms COUZENS: What about actual services in the early learning space, like playgroups, kindergartens?

Ms DEKUEK: Well, I think it is a bit hard. Let us especially talk from my perspective, or from the South Sudanese perspective or any other African perspective, given that the families are big families and it is something that they are not used to—taking the kids to the playground or to a teaching group. Even, for example, when I am at home with my sons, I normally tell the parents, ‘Come. We’re having the playgroup here’, and they say, ‘Oh, I’m too busy. I cannot go out with three children’—all these things. So it is something that people need to be encouraged to do.

Ms COUZENS: So that is a cultural thing.

Ms DEKUEK: Yes.

The CHAIR: One final question from Heang.

Mr TAK: It was not a question, but I thank the Chair. It is just something to note. Susan, this is my suggestion only, because you already have a community base, friends and multicultural events like Diwali—

Ms DALLAS: We are not happy with Diwali only. Diwali is the second festival. Dussehra is the big fun place.

Mr TAK: Yes, that is right. But for community organisations, perhaps you can get small funding from the multicultural department, and by doing so you can celebrate different cultures and at the same time allow the locals here to appreciate the different cultures. I would encourage you to look into that. We have a local member here who you can probably—

Ms SETTLE: I am happy to help.

Ms DALLAS: I really want to do that because a number of people are coming here for their PR and things like that, and their family. Once they come here, kids are starting school and they just do not want to go back to other areas because they love going to the school. The Nepalese community thinks that education is really good in Ballarat, so they just want to stick here. They do not want to go to any other place. So I really want to encourage you guys to do something like a small festival. There is a special women’s festival for the Nepalese. That is only for women. No men are allowed. They dance and they sing. That is a really special thing for ladies, so we can do that also to encourage the Nepalese community to come here. The other communities also join in and dance like that. I really want to do that.

Ms COUZENS: Yes, we do that in Geelong.

Ms SETTLE: That is meant to be community driven, Diwali, because there is an Indian association here. Maybe the Nepalese community could form an association, and then there is funding to support the festival.

Ms DALLAS: Yes. I will talk to all of my group and make a plan and then come to—

Ms SETTLE: I am in Ballarat.

Ms DALLAS: Yes, come to you and then we will start doing our Nepalese things with all of the Australians and all my other friends also. Abrar wants to say something, I think.

Ms DHAM: No.

Ms DALLAS: She has one idea that is going to open soon: one multicultural childcare centre for everyone. She is shy to talk about that, but I am just talking on behalf of her. Do you want to say that?

Ms DHAM: Yes, I guess so. Seeing the gap in the early years of childhood, I was thinking to establish an eco-friendly childcare centre that will employ people from different cultural backgrounds. Everyone can share their songs and—I do not know—nursery rhymes and some traditional things, and we can do celebration together.

Ms DALLAS: Food, costumes.

Ms DHAM: Food, costumes—all of that. But it is a work in progress. I guess I am just getting to know the Ballarat community here through my work at child care. It is an idea. If it is ever going to happen, I am not sure. Hopefully—fingers crossed—but, yes, that is my dream.

Mr TAK: Big things start from small things.

Ms DHAM: Yes, that is it.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for sharing your experiences and presenting here and taking the time out from work as well. I know you have to get back to work. On behalf of the committee, you have really given us an insight into what people are experiencing from CALD communities.

The next step is that we have two more public hearings, and then the Committee will deliberate all the evidence and submissions. We will then form a report with some strong recommendations to Government next year. The report will be presented to Parliament. I am sure you will be updated with the progress of this Inquiry. So again, I take the opportunity to thank you.

Ms DHAM: Thank you for the opportunity.

The CHAIR: I know it is sometimes a little bit challenging, but you have all done very, very well, I must say. Just on a separate note, I do want to leave you with this note: I know you keep comparing to City of Hume—

Ms DHAM: Sorry.

The CHAIR: and that is fantastic because that just shows you—I mean, City of Hume, Broadmeadows, was not what it is today 20 years ago.

Ms DHAM: That is it, yes.

The CHAIR: A lot of work has gone into establishing those networks, multicultural groups, council leadership and the role of council and community groups—and even government. I am sure it will get there, so please persist. As my colleague said, from small things big things grow. Thank you very, very much.

Witnesses withdrew.