

## The Beginnings

United in Diversity started in 2017 as HUSCS which is an acronym for Harmony, Understanding, Support, Collaboration and Success. These five words literally came to me as I sat in my office at 145 Jull Street Armadale AMEP campus of South Metropolitan TAFE. I was the coordinator of SEE program and my students' needs inspired me each day to seek ways in which they could find jobs and become self-reliant. Unlike the AMEP which teaches English to newly arrived migrants, the SEE program was for job seekers who were seeking support for language and literacy to improve their chances of being employed. Most SEE students at the Jull Street campus were from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) backgrounds.

I realised that one of the barriers in my students' way of getting jobs is their lack of self-belief. And in most cases, it seemed to stem from their isolation. Most of them came to the class and then went home and 'barricaded' themselves behind their doors. I had a feeling that being on welfare and being isolated could be a perfect recipe for an impending rise in crime in the community considering the frustration those two things would create in these people's and their children's minds.

Around this time, I came across a 2013 research by ECU and UNSW which said 'Frequent, positive intercultural contact is a powerful driver for all dimensions of social cohesion. I felt that when people meet each other frequently they get to know about each other's skills and talents. That's how they can create the networks to support each other to have jobs, collaborate with each other and to have a good successful life and that is good for the whole community. Communities in which individuals feel helped and supported are safe communities.

My colleague Clare Harris put me in touch with Rebecca Hall, then Community Development Officer with City of Canning who agreed to provide us a spot in Cannington Library to meet once a month. A young member of the community, Niharika, became my unofficial assistant as I was short strapped for time being in full time employment. At this stage all members were English students from Armadale. We began to meet; members would bring their families and we would have fun and team building activities. I would fund the tea and snacks, a tradition that still is ongoing.

However, pretty soon members began to feel they were interacting only with each other. They wanted more. Inclusion Solutions, a community organisation in WA, was running a 'Club Abilities' project at the time. They took us under their wing and helped us to clarify our vision, mission etc. At that meeting in October 2017 members renamed HUSCS as 'United in Diversity'. In November 2017 meeting members made a decision to get incorporated.

United in Diversity WA was incorporated on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018. In March 2018, Inclusion Solutions asked us to be involved in the Club Abilities community event. Subsequently, we decided to be involved in City of Canning and City of Belmont Harmony Day celebrations. We needed to have Public Liability Insurance and had to think of creative ways to engage with the community and raise funds. The first project we wrote a grant application for was Women's Pampering Day to City of Canning. We were given a grant of \$500 for that project. It was a good learning experience.

In July of that year, City of Armadale provided us a funding of \$4567.60 for 'Tastes of Diversity' project at Greendale Centre in Armadale. With valuable mentoring from Jon Cope, the Community Arts Development Officer of the city, United in Diversity were able to deliver a successful project which opened the way for ongoing engagement at Greendale Centre which was the venue for Tastes of Diversity. Through Tastes of Diversity, a need for UID cooks to have HACCP training arose.

OMI provided a funding of \$4520 for that training which was completed in February 2019.

In October 2018, Steve De Meillon joined City of Canning as Community Development Officer. He turned into a UID champion and put us in touch with Harmony Beyond Fences, a group of about 350 residents from East Cannington. Steve also took Tastes of Diversity to Canning Lodge who funded the project with \$2500 in a unique format.

2019

City of Canning provided \$4766.16 funding for Canning Tastes of Diversity which was completed in April 2019.