

# Building a relationship with Melbourne's Islamic community

**Whether it's meeting the Mufti of Australia, networking with young people from the Horn of Africa, bringing together police and Islamic community members under the banner of sport, or hosting an inaugural Iftar event, the AFP's Islamic Liaison Team is committed to promoting a diverse and harmonious engagement between the AFP and the Islamic community.**

The team was formed in April following four months of extensive consultation between the AFP and the Melbourne Islamic community. The team's leader, Federal Agent Sam Elmaghrawy, said the Islamic communities perceived that they were the primary focus of Australian law enforcement agencies and under constant observation.

"These issues were contributing to a distrust of the AFP, which largely came from a general misunderstanding of the roles and responsibilities of law enforcement and national security operations," Federal Agent Elmaghrawy said. "In particular, the consensus is particularly prevalent among Muslim youth who are generally struggling to find a constructive place within Australian society."

Federal Agent Elmaghrawy also said that strengthening the Muslim communities' relationships with law enforcement, demystifying the AFP's role and communicating at grass root levels were the key issues identified by the Islamic Liaison Team (ILT).



As part of the 12-month pilot program, the team is keen to ensure community perceptions and issues are addressed. Three core objectives have been identified as a positive way forward. These are: engaging with Melbourne's Islamic communities with a focus on Muslim youth, educating AFP staff on Islamic issues and informing Islamic communities about the AFP's role and responsibilities, and encouraging Melbourne's Muslims to consider an AFP career.

In March, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC)

issued *Unlocking Doors* – A report on a dialogue between Muslim communities, HREOC and police in NSW and Victoria, a project funded by the federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship. Federal Agent Elmaghrawy said it was reassuring that the report's recommendations and strategies supported the objectives and principles of the team's submission.

"The team has been busy over the past eight months building dialogue and partnerships as well as sharing information through initiatives and events," he said. "One of our most significant and successful events



included the AFP hosting its first Iftar dinner during the holy month of Ramadan.”

In mid-September, more than 260 people from more than 40 groups within Melbourne’s Muslim community joined the Mufti of Australia, Sheikh Fehmi El-Imam, and Commissioner Keelty in the breaking of the fast. Commissioner Keelty said events like that promoted greater understanding between people of different cultures and backgrounds.

Other events involving the Islamic community have included:

- providing a display at the October Eid-ul-Fitr festival held in Melbourne and attended by more than 60,000 people
- meeting with young people from the Horn of Africa community to explain the AFP’s role
- co-hosting a community family day with Victoria Police and the Islamic Council of Victoria which included soccer tournaments
- giving presentations at Islamic school career days
- partnering with the Essendon Football

Club on the *Extend a Hand* project

- providing tours of the Melbourne office.

In addition to these events, the team has also seen an increase in interest from members of the Islamic community in pursuing a career with the AFP.

The pilot project has also proven popular. Other government departments and law enforcement agencies have approached the team to speak about its unique role, community based programs and the positive outcomes achieved in promoting solid relationships.