

## Multicultural Food Festival & Fashion Parade Report

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*The event will provide a women only fashion parade for women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, to enable local Muslim women to interact without their hijab and to demystify its use. The Fashion Parade will then be complimented by a Multicultural Food Festival involving Iraqi, Kurdish, Kuwaiti, Albanian and Congolese cultural dishes. The event aims to show the "genuine willingness of the multicultural/ethnic groups to be an active part of the community.*

A whirl of bright colours, pulsating music and the tantalizing aroma of exotic dishes heralded a fabulous women`s celebration of Food and Fashion by 27 representatives of Iraqi, Afghani, Congolese and Sudanese cultures living in Shepparton.

Before the event there was a flurry of planning afternoons where absolutely everyone wanted to talk at once but where everyone had to resort to using English as a common language. It was a revelation to some that different cultures shared the same language - Arabic. After a few fraught sessions a degree of coordination emerged where excited women and young girls were persuaded to walk slowly along a catwalk thereby providing an eager audience time to take in a myriad of decoration, colour and design.

On the night backstage was electric with celebration, everyone wanted their 15 minutes of fame and each was intent on being the most glamorous. It was all hair spray, eye liner and lipstick. This was not a place for the timid; this was the land of fashionistas. Paraded garments ranged from casual street wear to glamorous celebratory jewel encrusted draas culminating with the picture book wedding gown. The all female audience were thrilled unaccustomed to such an uninhibited group of normally hijab covered women comfortably showcasing their clothes. Two feverish belly dancers proudly shimmered their way through a final flourish.

A series of intervals allowed representatives of each culture to explain various aspects of their life and beliefs, however it was the array of food which had the audience eager to ask questions and swap ideas. The powerful visual impact of the food presented in an array of shapes and dishes was a comfortable way to create strong connections between all women. Assailed by different tastes the audience felt comfortable questioning ways of preparation, ingredients and how what was eaten, when and why.

The joy at seeing two important aspects of women`s lives food and fashion drawing women of all cultures together is heartwarming. Curiosity of what was behind the veil was satiated. It was an evening where differences were forgotten and achievements were celebrated.

Thank you for providing funding which enabled Food & Fashion to happen.

A Celebration of Food & Fashion, Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2007, UnitingCare Cutting Edge Wesley Hall

