

UIA WOMEN'S FORUM A SUCCESS STORY

To coincide with the International Women's Day Week, the Women's Steering Committee of United Indian Associations, organised a Women's Forum on Saturday, 3 March, 2007, at the Parravilla Function Centre, Parramatta. It was organised in partnership with the Migrant Resource Centre, Baulkham Hills, Holroyd and Parramatta regions and supported by Community Relations Commission. CRC gave a generous grant for this Forum. This Women's Forum was very well received and proved to be a great success. About 200 women packed the Parravilla Function Centre to participate in this Forum. The feedback received from the participants has been very positive and encouraging.



This Forum clearly showed how much the Indian Community needs to be educated about the resources of community care facilities and services available in Australia.

This Women's Forum was a means of providing information to enhance awareness amongst Women of Indian origin about the community services available in different areas of need. It also provided a platform for women to network with each other in a general discussion and interaction and to have their concerns and needs addressed through a question and answer session with the invited speakers representing different service agencies. To identify and assess specific cultural needs of women from Indian Subcontinent, the women were requested to complete a questionnaire on a voluntary basis. The Forum has provided a firm foundation to develop and implement further strategies to address those specific needs of Indian women.

Several Dignitaries attended the function, notably the chief guest, Mr. Stepan Kerkyasharian, Chair of CRC; Julie Owens, the Federal MP for Parramatta; Louis Markus, the Federal MP for Greenway; Manju Channan, Consul representing Consul General of India; Macey Kavalee, representing Director of Immigration and Citizenship; and Lucille Leung, President Australia Chinese Community Association. The programme began with a Welcome by the Women's Committee Chairperson, Sumati Advani, who spoke about the aims of the Women's Steering Committee. She introduced the Women's Forum Director, Neena Sinha, and spoke highly of the excellent work done by Neena in organising and coordinating the Women's Forum. Neena then spoke about the objectives of the Women's Steering Committee and the Forum and gave an overview of the proceedings of the Women's Forum. She emphasised the need in the community of such Forums to benefit women of Indian origin, especially the newly arrived migrant women and students. Neena introduced the Professional Facilitator, Amrit Versha, who would be submitting an evaluation report of the Forum to United Indian Associations Women's Steering Committee. Amrit then took over the proceedings of the day as facilitator of the Forum and invited the first speaker, UIA president/Chairperson Dr. Prabhat Sinha. He congratulated the Women's Steering Committee members for their hard work and especially the Women's Forum Director, Neena, who had worked tirelessly for the last few months, towards the organisation of this Forum. Dr. Sinha highlighted the international acclaim received by Indian Women in various fields.





He spoke of the role of UIA and its future directions for continued community involvement and integration with mainstream Australia in the true spirit of Multiculturalism. Dr. Sinha invited the chief guest, Mr. Stepan Kerkyasharian to address the gathering. Mr. Kerkyasharian applauded the efforts of the Women's Steering Committee towards the betterment of Indian Women and congratulated them for a job well done.



Several invited speakers, with expertise in different community sectors, gave an insight into issues facing women in general and women of Indian origin in particular.

Lina Cabaero, the coordinator of Asian Women at work, apprised the women about the best possible ways to address work related issues like discrimination etc.

Nalika Padmasena detailed the free Holistic Health Facilities and free Counselling services available at Cumberland Women's Health Centres and about access to free legal services available through Community Legal Resource Centres for Women.



Dr. Rugmini Venkataraman, an Anti-Violence Specialist, gave a very informative Power Point presentation about the help and services available to address the various issues of domestic violence. This presentation was very well received.

This talk was followed by a question answer session which brought about a proactive interaction between the speakers and the audience. A video presentation of UIA and its activities was shown to provide some entertainment with the showcasing of the various cultural programs organised during the year 2006-2007 during the tea break.



The second session resumed with a presentation and enactment of Personal Safety Issues, Role of Police and Community Police Volunteering. This was presented in a very entertaining and educational manner by Ethnic Police Liaison officers Sophia Spyrou and Mary Moussa. Pam Alley, the Service Co-ordinator for Commonwealth Carelink Centre, gave a very informative talk about the accessibility, support and assistance, financial and otherwise, available to Carers of Aged and Disabled People. Six women were provided respite by the Commonwealth Carelink Centre to attend this Forum. The motivational discourse given by Seide Ramadani, the last speaker, was very moving, confidence building and entertaining. This was followed once again by a Question Answer Session involving participation and discussion on different issues facing women. Women were asked to complete the voluntary survey forms which would be analysed to assess further specific needs of Women from Indian Subcontinent.



Vote of thanks was given by the Women's Steering Committee Member, Monika Bhatia, who thanked the sponsors Prabhjot of Parravilla Function Centre, Billu from Billu's Eatery and Indus Age. She also thanked CRC for their grant, MRC, BHHP, for all their assistance, Facilitator Amrit Versha, radio stations and Chandana TV for the publicity, and all the speakers, guests and the audience. The Women's Forum concluded with a hearty lunch which was enjoyed by everyone.



All in all, it proved to be a very successful platform for Women in the International Women's Day week. This Forum has received very encouraging feedback and has highlighted a need for such Women's forums in the future to provide further support to the Women in need and to involve the community at large. It has provided the nucleus for developing further appropriate strategies to expand future community programmes and interaction between Women of Indian origin. The success of this Women's Forum has given a good start to UIA by addressing women's issues so that further strategies can be implemented to



address those specific needs in the future.



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