

Ecumenical Migration Centre, Melbourne – the first 20 years

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by Michele Langfield

What is EMC and what does it do?

The Ecumenical Migration Centre (EMC) is a non-profit-making community agency which began in the early 1960s. It assists disadvantaged migrants and refugees by promoting their rights and well-being and recognising their contributions to Australia's multicultural society. Its main areas of work today are to support the initial settlement of migrants and refugees by providing welfare services, counselling and advice; to assist with community development, sponsor research and help with policy development; and to provide community education and training. Although its work has been largely confined to Victoria, and particularly inner-city Melbourne, its influence has been far greater through the dissemination of its knowledge of ethnic issues and its vision for a just and egalitarian Australia.

Traditionally, its ‘clients’ were non-English speaking Greeks, Italians, Turks and Yugoslavs. With the end of the white Australia policy, and especially since the late 1970s, this ‘clientele’ has broadened to include Vietnamese, Timorese and a wide range of new and emerging migrant communities originating from Africa, Central America and elsewhere, many of whom have been refugees. Essentially, EMC works towards a less discriminatory environment in the workplace and general community, co-operating closely with government departments, ethnic

organisations and other community agencies. As government critic and watchdog, it lobbies for changes for the betterment of newcomers to Australian society, especially regarding the rights and status of refugees, overstayers and illegal immigrants. At the same time, it maintains a long-standing commitment to more established migrants who for a number of reasons remain disadvantaged.

Since 1973, EMC has also provided a unique library, bookshop and documentation service, the Clearing House on Migration Issues (CHOMI). CHOMI has played an important role stimulating debate on all aspects of ethnic affairs. It collects, produces, edits and sponsors a range of publications, notably the journal *Migration Action*, as well as a bi-monthly bulletin, CHOMI-DAS, and a series of reprints, monographs and kits.

EMC was part of a network of voluntary welfare organisations formed in the 1960s and early 1970s when migrants were first developing a political voice in Australia. They were established partly to overcome the neglect of migrants by governments and were largely concentrated in the inner city. Like EMC, they took a strong position on ethnic rights while believing that migrants themselves must be involved in pressing for improvements and organising programmes to benefit their own communities.

Early days

In the 1950s, at a time of increased European migration to Australia, many refugees and displaced persons were sponsored by the Resettlement Department of the Australian Council of Churches. In particular, the Department accepted responsibility from the World Council of Churches (WCC) to take Eastern European teenagers. In 1957, Eric

Richards from the Resettlement Department approached David Cox, President of the Victorian Christian Youth Council, to see if Australian youth movements could assist with the settlement of the boys. David organised a group of volunteers to visit the refugees and introduce them to Australian youth.

Out of this work grew an organisation called the European Australian Christian Fellowship (EACF), formed in 1961 and later to become the Ecumenical Migration Centre. Its aim was to serve the needs of migrant communities in Melbourne's inner suburbs. David Cox and Eric Richards began a street-work programme, visiting the boys regularly and helping to sort out their difficulties. Country visits and youth camps were organised where they were billeted with families connected with the Church. The work depended on building friendship networks between the refugees and local residents within a Christian framework in order to overcome the sense of loneliness and isolation. Although this quickly developed into an outreach into the migrant community in general, the emphasis at the start was firmly upon youth, on community-based social and sporting activities, with some individual work.

In the fifties and sixties, the migrant population in Carlton, Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond was steadily increasing. For many migrants, these relatively depressed areas were the first stop before moving elsewhere. The need for migrant youth clubs was soon demonstrated and the EACF was a spur to their development. One of these was a North Carlton group, the Orthodox Youth Organisation led by Nick Grigorovitch, another was the North Melbourne Yugoslav Folk Dancing Group. They provided an opportunity for young people to mix with others of the same language and background while at the same time combining with Australian Christian youth groups for camps, dances and basketball.

The economic downturn in 1961 and its effect on migrants encouraged David Cox to take up migrant work on a full-time basis, gradually inspiring others to join him. He was supported

by Eric Richards, the Division of Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and many suburban church congregations. Over the next few years, the EACF evolved into a more formal entity, becoming a 'committee' or 'commission' of the Victorian Council of Churches. Bishop Geoffrey Sambell (later Archbishop), Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, became Convener and Eric Richards Chairman, with a Committee approved by the Council. The following year, David Cox became the first full-time secretary/field worker, his position subsidised by the Brotherhood. The aim of helping migrant youth blend into the community through participation in various organised activities, was consistent with the post-war social ideologies of assimilation and integration; that migrants should adapt to 'the Australian way of life'.

Open to all and independent of political or religious affiliation, the EACF filled gaps in existing work with ethnic communities in Melbourne, first operating from the office of the Brotherhood in Fitzroy. An innovative programme was developed by a small group of visionaries which provided friendship, advice, and often, simply much needed welfare assistance. Little was being done elsewhere, especially for Eastern Europeans, and in the first two years contact was made with over 700 migrant youth. A notable feature of the EACF was its team spirit, the team consisting of David Cox, Eric Richards, John Kalisperis and Savas Augoustakis. As contacts grew and the field of responsibility widened, case work began with the unemployed and low income migrant families. The family work often involved counselling in cases of marital breakdown especially where European marriage customs, such as arranged marriages and approved codes of behaviour for women, came into conflict with accepted practices in Australia. From the very beginning, the support of volunteer workers was crucial to the functioning of the organisation.

The Espresso Bar in North Carlton

In 1963, an espresso bar was officially opened in North Carlton with John Kalisperis as manager. Embracing club, hostel and later office facilities and hall, this centre was the headquarters of the EACF until 1967. The choice of an espresso bar already showed the impact of post-war European migration. John Kalisperis and Savas Augoustakis were probably the first community-based ethnic workers in Melbourne. The centre was used regularly by about 300 migrant boys and sporadically by 3-400 others, mostly Greek but with a growing percentage of other Southern Europeans. An adjoining hall was opened four evenings a week and sporting teams were launched into competition. One of these was the North Carlton Olympic Soccer Club, formed in 1964 and registered with the Soccer Federation of Victoria in 1965, playing its first competition game at Middle Park.

The Committee was also given a block of land on Phillip Island for use as a holiday centre. Built by volunteers in 1963, the house accommodated up to twenty people and was used by both the EACF and EMC for weekend and holiday programmes for migrants and refugees for the next twenty years.

Throughout the 1960s, the EACF worked closely with the Greek Orthodox Churches since Greeks, both young and old, utilised the church and gravitated around it. Savas also wrote articles for the Greek press outlining the process of accessing pensions, sickness and unemployment benefits, wherever possible comparing the Australian system with that of Greece. Before the rights movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, this kind of community education was not available for non-English speakers.

Work expanded to include helping the mentally ill and boys in trouble or on probation. The last resulted from the appointment of Savas as Honorary Probation Officer to the Children's Court, the first Greek-speaking person to be

appointed to this position and a significant achievement in the history of the EACF. Kay Sarll and Jill McArthur, who joined the team in the mid 1960s together pioneered women's work at the EACF.

The nature of the work carried out by the EACF in the 1960s was not always well received in the general community. 'Hate mail' and abusive telephone calls were frequently received before the advent of multiculturalism. Those who responded to calls for financial and other assistance were almost entirely members of the Church. The continuing problem of funding the organisation is a persistent theme running through the entire history of EMC but less evident in the very early years when operations were comparatively small. Various fund raising projects were conducted over the years by volunteers. While providing a small and steady source of income they did not alleviate the basic and ongoing problem of financing an expanding organisation of this type.

For the first few years, David Cox produced regular newsletters, which in August 1966 became *The Navigator*. The journal, produced bi-monthly, addressed both the situations confronting migrants on arrival in Australia, and Australians when they came into contact with migrants. That there were nearly 800 subscribers at this time is indicative of the community interest which quickly developed.

In 1967, the Rev. Alan Matheson, later Ethnic Liaison and International Officer for the Australian Council of Trade Unions, joined the EACF, bringing 'the team' to five. Alan was experienced in inner-suburban work with the Church of Christ and had been involved in migrant youth work for some years. Richard McGarvie, later Governor of Victoria, was legal consultant and adviser to the team while Dr Markus Benjamin was psychiatric consultant. These men were all active churchmen as well as being leaders in their professions; it was men like these who believed in the vision of EMC.

The Move to Richmond

In September 1967, the Centre closed in North Carlton and moved to Richmond. With its higher migrant concentration, Richmond was seen as a more appropriate location. The new headquarters were centrally positioned within the belt of inner suburbs through which the Centre operated. Home to the organisation for the next 21 years, these headquarters saw a change in approach which emphasised two main strands: Greek-oriented casework and community education and development. A library on migration and related issues was begun. The following year, Savas Augoustakis left to join the Kriftel Ecumenical team in Germany to work with migrants in the industrial areas of Frankfurt for twelve months, sponsored by the Australian and World Council of Churches.

The first annual meeting of the EACF was held in May 1968, attended by about 180 people representing many churches, community organisations and the Immigration Department. Guest speaker was Dr Charles Price, author of *Southern Europeans in Australia*. At the same time, Alan Storer began work on a revised constitution and suggestions were invited for a new name for the organisation which would better represent the work carried out. Over time, the name European Australian Christian Fellowship had become inappropriate. For the Greek community there was a natural connection between the Church and its traditional role in welfare provision. The strong Christian base was less easily accepted by the growing variety of migrant communities the agency served by the end of the decade and indeed somewhat of a barrier in work with non-Christian migrants. From over fifty proposals, a new name emerged which incorporated three key elements: the ecumenical context, the migrants themselves, and the Centre to which they could come, hence the Ecumenical Migration Centre. The new name, however, was not formally used until 1972.

Over this first decade, the EACF had expanded

significantly. It increased its status as *The Navigator* widened its scope and circulation. In 1968 it affiliated with the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) and the Good Neighbour Council. It was recognised by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and was one of four agencies in Victoria in 1969 to receive a grant under the new Grant-In-Aid scheme. This scheme began in the transitional period of integration between the end of the official policy of assimilation and the emergence of multiculturalism. Migrant welfare would be funded via Grant-in-Aid programmes channelled through ethnic community organisations. For EMC, it was a major step forward since it meant that the salary of a social worker would be covered by the government.

Key features of the EACF in the 1960s

1. Close connection with and dependence on the Churches; welfare work often intertwined with religious teaching and a sense of 'mission'.
2. Early years dominated by the vision and leadership of David Cox.
3. The organisational structure of 'the team', arising partly from past experience of members with ecumenical teams in Australia and Europe. The partnership between an English-speaking and an ethnic worker constituted an original working model which was critical at a time when there were no trained bilingual social workers.
4. Focus on welfare and some advocacy, the main activities being casework, direct material assistance, speaking engagements, the leisure centre, the Phillip Island house, and the street-work programme.
5. The nature of the street work was pioneering in Australia, occurring within the environment of the espresso

bar and after hours when young people were available.

6. Youth work was given the highest priority and was largely confined to teenage boys. Both workers and 'clients' at this time were predominantly male. This work laid the foundation for much of the later understanding of migrant youth and facilities for their integration but for some years paid little attention to women.
7. Financial support was drawn exclusively from voluntary and church-based sources, mostly limited to individual donations and aid from the World and Australian Council of Churches. There were no government grants for migrant welfare until the Grant-in-Aid scheme in 1969.
8. Political activity and interaction with governments was limited in the sixties.
9. Volunteers played a key role in the agency from its inception.
10. The agency established a wide reputation in the field of migrant care.

The formation and work of the EACF was an important part of Australia's response to post-war migration in the late fifties and sixties. By the end of the sixties, however, tensions were developing within the agency between the need for research and the need to deal with 'the problems of the here and now'. There was also a recognition of the necessity to take on a political role, to improve the selection process, equip and educate migrants and persuade the government to provide linguistically adequate and culturally-orientated services. Rights and participation as well as welfare for migrants was firmly on the agenda.

The context of the 1970s

The first half of the 1970s, especially the years

under the new Labor government, saw major changes in immigration policy. The 'white Australia' policy finally ended and multiculturalism was officially adopted. A new Australian Citizenship Act was passed and family reunion for migrants emphasised. The Migration Act of 1973 abolished race as a criterion for selection and there was more government consultation with migrant groups concerning their needs. In 1973, a survey called *A Decade of Migrant Settlement* was undertaken by the Australian Population and Immigration Council and the Henderson Poverty Inquiry was conducted in 1975.

Migrant voices were being increasingly heard through an emerging ethnic press, ethnic community groups and new welfare agencies, such as the Australian-Greek Welfare Society (AGWS), CO.AS.IT. (Comitato Assistenza Italiani - Italian Welfare Committee) and FILEF (the Italian Federation of Emigrant Workers and their Families). There was a consequent shift away from the few previously established middle class migrant welfare organisations. Positive attempts were made by educational institutions to teach more foreign languages and introduce greater awareness of Aboriginal and immigrant cultures.

The Whitlam Labor government recognised that migrants were disadvantaged and set up the Australian Assistance Plan to provide an integrated system of welfare services with considerable input at a grassroots level. Ethnic Communities' Councils were formed in South Australia and Victoria in 1974, and in New South Wales in 1975. Al Grassby, Minister for Immigration, established Migrant Task Forces. Prominent on the Victorian Task Force was Walter Lippmann, who was to have a long association with EMC in the fight for ethnic justice. These developments were significant in the move towards multiculturalism resulting in a rapid increase in the number of government-funded community welfare workers.

The gradual dismantling of 'white Australia' over two decades and the effects of the Vietnam War had a marked impact on the ethnic

composition of Australia's immigrants and the size and nature of the refugee intake. David Cox and Alan Matheson were the main forces behind EMC's response to these changes.

EMC's response

The role of the Centre broadened and dependence on the churches lessened with the growing number of 'clients' from non-European and non-Christian backgrounds. The volunteers took on the form of an auxiliary. New staff led to a gradual dilution of the earlier philosophy and common outlook which had been moulded and shared by the original team members. The Rev. Stan Weeks replaced Bishop Sambell as Chairman. Staff and volunteers travelled overseas, building up international networks and investigating migrant issues. EMC, and Alan Matheson in particular, together with FILEF and ANFE (National Association for the Family of Migrants) played a key role in bringing European debates over the place of migrants in the work force to Australia. This led EMC into the realm of social action research.

Welfare and Integration

The experience of EMC in the early 1970s confirmed the findings of the Melbourne Poverty Survey regarding the degree of poverty amongst newly-arrived, Southern Europeans. EMC concentrated on meeting the needs of this group, mainly Greeks. Their problems were mainly economic but also psychiatric, marital and work-related. Near-crisis situations resulted from illness, accident or desertion of husbands, exacerbated by poor English. Many problems were the result of the clash of cultures. Although welfare services were increasing, family and youth counselling services, marriage guidance centres, social services and vocational training facilities were grossly inadequate in these years. There were few bilingual professional workers with sufficient cultural understanding and training and EMC was fortunate in 1971 in gaining a second Grant-in-Aid position for a social worker for the growing Yugoslav community.

As an extension of the welfare work, David Cox stressed the importance of the social integration of migrant families and single men. The base for all work was the 'Navigator Centre' in Richmond but social activities such as barbecues, picnics, women's meetings, trips to country towns and Phillip Island, played a significant part in the integration process. Disadvantaged families, single mothers, deserted wives and groups of young people from the Housing Commission, were able to meet with the Australian community in a way which was not possible in the city. The North Carlton Olympic soccer team involved a large number of migrant adolescents and provided an important source of recreation and sense of belonging.

Service provision was still closely linked with the spread of the Christian message and EMC staff assisted ethnic church and community bodies to develop an understanding of migrants and the facilities they required. They worked closely with the Greek and Serbian Orthodox Churches, again focussing on youth.

Community Education

One of EMC's main aims at this time was to increase knowledge about integration, the new philosophy which replaced the assimilationist ethic of the 1950s and 1960s. Migrants were no longer forced to give up their own cultural heritage in order to become Australians. For EMC workers, integration meant developing better facilities and increasing community understanding; they wanted to create a society that was receptive to migrants and perceptive about migration. Thus community education became a major thrust of the Centre. A study of the relevance of culture in social work practice was conducted, lectures, seminars, workshops and conferences were organised, public speaking increased, articles for the religious press, daily press and professional journals burgeoned. There was also considerable media contact. EMC's own journal, *The Navigator*, began to include informative articles on race relations and the migrant experience, bibliographies and book reviews from a broad range of contributors. As a

disseminator of knowledge about migration, it stood alone in Australia at the time.

EMC did not work in isolation but co-operated with a variety of government and non-government organisations including the Australian and Victorian Council of Social Services, the latter collaboration resulting in the establishment of the Emergency Telephone Interpreting Service in 1973. In the same year, EMC was involved in a series of lectures on the rights of ethnic minorities, positioning itself slowly and surely in the political arena, as a protector of the civil rights and status of migrants and refugees, not only in Australia but worldwide.

The Turkish Community Development Project

In the mid-1970s, EMC moved into the area of ethnic community development. Requests for help came from recently arrived Turks experiencing discrimination in their dealings with police, court officials, estate agents and employers, and general alienation through inadequate support services. EMC operated a community development programme with the Turkish community from 1974-6 supported by local organisations and councils, the Myer and Potter Trusts, and the Social Welfare Commission. It involved voter registration drives, interpreting and translating, developing links between Turkish parents and schools, conducting English and Turkish language classes and trying to overcome difficulties between Turks and other groups. Staff worked with the Australian Turkish Cultural Association (ATCA), originally a soccer club, establishing and servicing a Drop-in Centre and Library in Mordialloc. The combination of an Australian and a Turkish worker (Priscilla Jamieson and Mehmet Salih) facilitated the development of stable self-help organisations within the Turkish communities in Melbourne. It was a pilot project for EMC, enabling the testing of community development theory with a non-English speaking group.

The Clearing House on Migration Issues (CHOMI)

Over a number of years EMC built up a modest but comprehensive library with a valuable collection of documents relating to immigration. In 1973 this was consolidated, expanded and developed into the Clearing House on Migration Issues (CHOMI). CHOMI was established well before academic institutions and community organisations were thinking about resources on immigration and for many years published documents and papers containing information not available from any other source. It was set up by Lidio Bertelli, an Italian sociologist, who believed that such specialised documentation centres should exchange rather than collect material; not duplicate services but act as places of referral, ultimately using a computerised database. The name, Clearing House on Migration Issues, reflected this philosophy. CHOMI's first monograph, *Towards an Understanding of the Greek Migrant* by David Cox, was published in 1974.

A new journal, *Migration Action* replaced *The Navigator* in 1974. It aimed to foster the development of Australia as a pluralistic society and was the first Australian journal of its kind to relate specifically to migration. It was to be readily accessible to non-English speakers and practical in its application: hence the inclusion of 'action' in the name.

A Time of Crisis

The mid-1970s were a time of crisis for EMC and uncertainty over future directions. Several staff appointments were short-lived. The issue of salaries, well below standard rates and paid on an equal basis to team members regardless of qualifications, was a sensitive one for new recruits. Those who had worked for the Church or as volunteers did not question the heavy demands of daily, evening and weekend work. As more women with family responsibilities joined the organisation, tensions built up and ideas about 'vocation' and 'professionalism'

became confused.

That the team was still feasible as a model of organisational structure was questioned. Its growing size meant that it could not function as it had in the past. Owing to the innovative nature of EMC, it attracted people with strong views in pioneering areas. This is exemplified by the ideological divide between David Cox and Alan Matheson over whether priority should be given to casework or community work. EMC was ahead of its time, continually moving into new areas, but this in itself posed problems. The move towards community development and education, and away from the original aims of the EACF and its Christian base, alienated many traditional supporters. The dilemma was whether to respond to the social context on the basis of 'consensus' or 'conflict'. The period marked a watershed, raising questions about the kind of agency EMC was or should become, whether it could expect to proceed with multiple goals, or whether staff cohesion demanded that it opt for one major objective around which sub-goals were built.

The outcome was that David Cox left EMC in January 1975 to become Director of International Social Service, and lecturer in Social Work at the University of Melbourne.

David retained links with EMC as a Committee member and consultant. At the same time, Savas Augoustakis left to undertake full-time study in social work. The loss of these two people, so long an integral part of the team, marked a noticeable shift in the basic philosophy of the agency. The Rev. Peter Hollingworth, Associate Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and later Archbishop of Brisbane, took over as Chairman.

Migrants and the Recession

In the mid-seventies Australia was experiencing a period of economic recession. This greatly affected the work of EMC and other such organisations. Requests for relief increased markedly and the role of EMC as an advocate for migrants in relation to government

departments such as Social Security expanded. The Phillip Island house was used extensively in order to give families some relief. EMC's Welfare Unit had an 'open-door' policy but was under-staffed. As the majority of those seeking help were Greek-speaking, John bore the heaviest caseload. The advent of women on the welfare staff in 1975 enabled closer work with families. John was also committed to helping long-term unemployed and those injured by industrial accidents. He worked closely with the Rehabilitation Service of the Commonwealth Department of Social Security and Family and Community Services. In 1977, he became the first ethnic worker to receive the VCOSS Community Services Award.

EMC maintained a close relationship with the AGWS to ensure complementarity and avoid overlap. Competition over government funding was inevitable. The continued economic squeeze and the contract service grant to the AGWS by the Department of Immigration in 1977 led to a re-examination of EMC's role in welfare service to Greeks. EMC's long-standing commitment to Greeks arose from the presence of Greek speakers within the organisation and its early history, when the bulk of those who arrived under the Resettlement Department of the Australian Council of Churches were Eastern European, Orthodox, and Greek.

Owing to the economic climate, education about migrant rights was seen by EMC staff, especially Alan Matheson, as increasingly important. In association with the ATCA, EMC applied for and received one of five welfare grants from the Australian Department of Social Security. A welfare rights programme was established in February 1975. Recep Alakus, secretary of the ATCA, was employed as the Turkish Welfare Rights Worker, followed by Gunay Koyunoglu in 1977. Material was prepared on social security benefits and Medibank, then distributed by doorknocks, stalls, press articles, Access Radio and from a drop-in centre in Richmond. A Social Welfare Department grant in 1976 made possible the employment of Romans Mapolar, a Turkish-speaking graduate, to continue work with the

Turkish community.

Demand for direct welfare services from the Turkish community expanded in 1977 and 1978 despite the fact that EMC's involvement was initially concerned with community development. Like the Greeks, Turks experienced high unemployment, high rates of industrial accidents, and consequent family breakdown. They were also concerned about child care. Turkish migrants were informed prior to arrival that child care facilities would be available in Australia. Both parents expected to work and for reasons of diet and preservation of language and family values, their own child care centres were crucial. EMC helped set up a number of centres although most did not open until the early 1980s. Other problems affecting the Turkish community were isolation resulting from a family reunion policy which adversely affected them, and the number of Turkish illegal migrants and overstayers.

The experience of EMC staff with the Turkish community informed much of their political involvement in the seventies, when work in the field threw up important issues. They were able then to move into the Vietnamese community although by that time there was a major change in government policy directed towards ethno-specific organisations. With governments generally moving away from the welfare area, EMC built up its networks and began to narrow its focus onto particular communities.

Timorese, Vietnamese and Laotians

During 1976 a group of Timorese refugees moved into the North Richmond area, in particular the high rise Housing Commission Estate. A new development within the Grant-in-Aid Scheme allowed smaller emerging ethnic groups with limited formal structures to be funded with the support of established agencies and EMC adopted this umbrella role in relation to the Timorese and later to other groups. In these years, the character of Richmond was changing markedly with the movement of Indo-Asians, particularly Vietnamese, both into the

'High Rise' and private accommodation. There were immediate practical needs to be met and EMC responded to these with the help of a Vietnamese social work student from Melbourne University. Increasingly such students chose to do their fieldwork at EMC. The network of projects involving the Richmond Vietnamese community over the following years was exceptional in Melbourne. The rapid growth in Vietnamese work led to the extension of EMC's operations in the 1980s to Footscray in the Western Suburbs. As a consequence of the large number of migrants and refugees arriving from non-traditional sources, and the public debate it provoked, EMC directed its energies to new initiatives in community education.

Community Work

The balance between direct welfare work and community development and education programmes continued to be a delicate one at EMC but the agency continued to do both. Community work had two facets: community education and community action or development. The first was directed towards the host community and meant providing lectures, courses and materials on the changing nature of society. The second meant meeting with community organisations and parental groups in order to break down discrimination against migrants and ethnic minorities. Community development was based on the belief that ethnic groups had the right to participate in decisions affecting them and to maintain and develop their own languages and cultural heritage. This philosophy of self help and empowerment was typical of other social service organisations and movements of the seventies, many from Fitzroy, and often described as part of the 'New Left'. The continuing policy shift over the years from migrants as recipients of services to active participants in decision-making meant greater involvement for EMC in activities such as ethnic broadcasting, Migrant Workers' Conferences, migrant worker training and education; and with organisations like VCOSS, the Centre for Urban Research and Action (CURA), FILEF, and the Federation of Ethnic

Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), among others.

Towards Multiculturalism

These developments from 1972 onwards were part of the fundamental move towards multiculturalism in Australia. Alan Matheson argues that the origins of multiculturalism in the late 1960s and 70s lay within the migrant worker organisations in Victoria. It was in Victoria that migrant workers organised their first conferences around employment and education concerns. It was in such contexts that the rights and responsibilities relating to languages and equity and access to services were first debated. It was the workers' conferences and ethnic worker organisations like FILEF and the AGWS, the Jewish and the Islamic communities, which first grappled with the issues of equal opportunity and empowerment. They were supported by young activist teachers, social workers, a few unionists and community agencies. The term 'multiculturalism', brought from the Canadian experience, was used at a comparatively early stage in Australia by EMC staff.

Two publications published by CURA provided the substantive political framework for multiculturalism: Des Storer's *Ethnic Rights, Power and Participation; Toward a Multicultural Australia* (1974) and 'But I wouldn't want my wife to work here. . . *A Study of Migrant Women in Melbourne Industry* (1976). At the same time, key workers in EMC and the AGWS, David Cox and Spiro Moraitis, provided the social policy and welfare framework which arose from the real experience of ordinary people.

CHOMI's role in community education

The range of activities with which EMC staff were involved in the late 1970s went well beyond the Christian-based activities of the first decade. The resources of CHOMI were extensively used to document and analyse the working experience, along with other agencies in the field. Such documentation by

practitioners became crucial for the planning and delivery of welfare services throughout Australia making them more relevant and accessible to migrants and indeed to Aboriginal groups. It also helped to identify what basic services were lacking or inappropriate and led to the greater appreciation of migrant issues by Australian-born people of English-speaking background. This effective merging of information and research with practice was an important step for EMC, making the Centre a major player in providing the foundations for social policy and research relevant to migrant welfare. The knowledge of community resources and processes contributed by Alan Matheson in these areas was crucial. Material he collected overseas on American, Canadian and English programmes had an important influence on the future direction of EMC. This juxtaposition of CHOMI with the direct welfare work of the Centre was one of EMC's major strengths. Through this, the relevant knowledge base for welfare and community workers around Australia and internationally, was gradually being compiled.

Alan Matheson left EMC in 1977 on a three-year contract as Migration Secretary with the WCC Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service in Geneva. This was international recognition of Alan and the Centre.

The Galbally Report and its implications for EMC

The recommendations of the Galbally Report of 1978 became the basis for government policies for migrant services over the next decade. While this led to a number of improvements (more Grant-in-Aid workers, ethnic schools, English language tuition and translation services, better communication and information, Migrant Resource Centres, the setting up in 1980 of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA) for research and policy advice, the extension of ethnic radio and the establishment of an ethnic television task force), inadequacies remained. Furthermore, it resulted in intense competition between groups for limited

government funding. Diana Batzias and Michael Liffman, Community Educator from 1977, were instrumental in developing both written and practical responses to the Report and also to the refugee 'crisis' at this time.

The creation of AIMA was apprehensively awaited to determine the role of CHOMI in the new post-Galbally situation. It was assumed that certain roles formerly fulfilled by CHOMI could be done by others while CHOMI would provide specialised services. AIMA had the potential either to wipe out or encompass CHOMI, causing tensions within EMC. The relationship between CHOMI and AIMA, and later with the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA), was a sensitive one and took some time to clarify. EMC staff hoped for a contractual arrangement with AIMA to fund a planned national on-line database on multicultural affairs. AIMA closed in December 1986, however, leaving the need for a national database unmet. The closure increased pressure on CHOMI which became, until the late 1980s, the only independent resource centre in Australia focussing on immigration, refugee, multicultural and ethnic issues. When MicroMAIS (Multicultural Australia and Immigration Studies) was established by OMA in 1988, it occurred with minimal input from, and recognition of, EMC despite the fact that the idea had originated from EMC staff and CHOMI was one of the key information providers.

Evaluating the 1970s

1. Despite government grants, EMC's financial base remained precarious. Its vulnerability reflected the lack of coherent government policy at the time on the funding of all non-government welfare agencies.
2. Welfare services by the end of the decade focussed on three main groups: Greeks, Turks and Indo-Asians. In this context, EMC became embroiled in current debates over whether welfare agencies should be general or ethnic-

specific. EMC particularly served migrants who, for status, class, confidentiality or other reasons, were unwilling or unable to use either ethnic agencies or general community services but who required access to an ethnic worker. EMC therefore occupied a special place in the community.

3. In the early 1970s, EMC had been one of the few agencies involved in migration and refugee work. The decade had seen sympathetic welfare services and structures introduced with a move away from the 'band-aid approach' to concern for community development, participation, consultation, a rights perspective and social action. A number of ethnic welfare agencies in local communities had been established, there were ethnic workers in general agencies, and an increased demand for training courses for welfare personnel.
4. Despite these improvements, EMC was critical of governments for not going far enough, not clarifying the contribution of ethnic welfare programmes, many of which were under-resourced and forced to rely on inexperienced and untrained staff so that the qualitative dimension of the service suffered.

EMC had been closely involved in key points of development towards multiculturalism over the 1970s: the establishment of agencies for specific ethnic groups, the series of discussions drawn together by CURA on ethnic rights, the emergence of ethnic action movements, the conferences on worker rights and multicultural education, important new research, and the campaign against the Good Neighbour Council, which brought to an end an official government and community-supported paternalistic and assimilationist approach to new migrants. These years epitomise the real history of EMC, 'when the pot started to boil' and equality of outcomes became the most important goal.

The size and composition of Australia's overall migration programme underwent significant shifts in the 1970s. The reduced intake in the early seventies began to increase by the end of the decade but the entry criteria had changed. It became more difficult for non-English speaking people to migrate, creating anguish for migrants already here wanting relatives to join them. On the other hand, it became easier for skilled English speakers to come and migration from Asia increased as a result. The refugee intake also increased dramatically at the end of the 1970s, with important implications for welfare programmes and community education. EMC was greatly affected by these changes, accused at times of being too conservative with regard to welfare and often itself critical of policy developments and community attitudes.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the full-time staff at EMC was four, two positions being funded by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration under the Grant-in-Aid scheme. Ten years later there were eight, as well as part-time staff and many volunteers and supporters, making the Centre one of the largest community agencies in the country working exclusively with migrants and refugees. The distinctive nature of EMC was that its focus was solely on migrants with services for *any* nationality or religion and with a commitment to helping the wider community appreciate and understand the aspirations and needs of immigrant groups.

Conclusion - later developments

EMC in the 1970s broke new ground in spearheading multiculturalism long before it was generally accepted in the community at large. In the years since then, the Centre has moved further towards project and policy development, community education and professional training, and the support of newly emerging migrant and refugee communities. It continues to provide a wealth of information, advice and consultancies on multiculturalism and migrant issues. As an advocate for the migrant cause it has opposed policies of 'mainstreaming' whereby the needs of

ethnic minorities were to be met by core government programmes and general service providers. It has worked closely with the Ethnic Affairs Commission, Immigration Reform Council, and Human Rights Commission, and taken head on issues of citizenship, social justice and racial prejudice. All this, while subject to perennial financial strain owing to the absence of regular funding for its core infrastructure.

In addition, EMC has continued to play an activist political role. It has been particularly vocal during nationwide controversies over Asian immigration such as the Blainey debate in 1984 and the Fitzgerald Report/John Howard 'One Australia' debate in 1988, through public discussion in the media and through its many publications. In each case a special edition of *Migration Action* was produced and in 1984, Renate Singer edited *The Immigration Debate in the Press*. In recognition of CHOMI's role in the 1984 debate, the authors of *Surrender Australia?*, a book of essays by academics critically reviewing the Blainey thesis, decided to donate their royalties to EMC.

Throughout its history EMC has maintained its vision for a multicultural Australia. In continuing to develop innovative projects, such as interpreting for women and support groups for the very newest and most vulnerable non-English speaking arrivals, it continues to be on the cutting edge of ethnic affairs.

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