



Finding Common Ground

TOOLKIT

Presented by Canadian Muslim youth and the Canadian Council of Muslim Women
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from Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Multiculturalism Program

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Introduction

Canada is often considered the model for how a highly diverse population can live peacefully. It is certainly true that, comparatively, Canada does well on this score and our diversity is indeed a source of great strength and vitality. Canadians have made a commitment to diversity, and Canada has defined itself as an immigrant society where economic and demographic health depends on attracting people from other countries as permanent, full-fledged citizens. In the past, however, diversity and multiculturalism resources and programs have often focused on race and ethnicity but not faith. A new focus on faith has placed greater emphasis on the need for increased integration of Canada's diverse peoples through fostering interaction between different faith communities and supporting community-based initiatives designed to facilitate inter-faith dialogue as well as the civic education of youth, particularly those who are at risk.

This increased focus on faith has often led to a focus on Islam. The Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) became increasingly concerned about the racism, discrimination, anti-Muslim rhetoric and overt hostility towards Islam and the resulting alienation of Muslim youth from mainstream society. This alienation is finding a sympathetic ear among literalist and extremist Muslim leaders and institutions. CCMW also saw that a critical need existed to re-engage Muslim youth in the civic life of Canada and to instill a sense of belonging and engagement with all aspects of Canadian life, so Muslim youth can feel safe, empowered, and self-confident and are not subjected to harassment, discrimination and racism on the basis of their religion.

As a result, CCMW embarked on a project titled MY CANADA, which began in 2009 and will conclude in 2011. This project provides a platform for Muslim youth to engage in a dialogue in which they themselves identify the issues and solutions, including strategies for engagement with key partners in the educational, political and social systems. Technology was used as a valuable enabler in promoting a Canadian Muslim identity that encompasses the multiple identities Muslim youth possess – identities

they can be proud of. The ultimate goal of the toolkit, which includes a video and manual, is to prevent the further alienation of Muslim youth and provide alternatives for them that are more attractive than those drawing them to disengagement from mainstream society. Benefits in this approach for the youth include an improved quality of life, employment opportunities, and the ability to create positive change in Canadian society.

The project was based on an initial forum that gathered over 100 Muslim youth, with representation from all parts of Canada, to discuss what it is to be a Canadian Muslim today and their roles in civic engagement. Break out groups were held to provide the youth with skills development, focusing on how to facilitate workshops and navigate the conversations on faith. Following the forum, the youth organized workshops in their local communities and remained engaged on the MY CANADA web portal, Facebook and Twitter accounts that were set up.

A toolkit was developed after the forum and over the course of a year. The youth were highly involved in the development of the toolkit, providing input and feedback during the sessions at the forum and creating the content of both the manual and the video. The CCMW Board provided oversight and input into the overall project.

The toolkit, titled *MY Canada: Finding Common Ground*, is composed of a manual and video as previously indicated. The video includes interviews with youth across Canada, covering a variety of sects, cultures, and geographies to showcase the plurality of Islam. The manual is an accompanying guide that provides practical and tactical suggestions on conducting workshops and facilitating dialogues with Muslim youth across the country. It covers a wide range of topics including leadership, media relations, civic engagement, creative expression, and community resources. CCMW sees this toolkit as a living document, creating discussions across the country and fostering interaction between different faith communities as well as within Muslim communities.

CCMW would like to thank our funders, supporters, and most of all the youth for sharing their stories and making the development of this project a highly engaging one for all involved. We hope that this is the beginning of a conversation that stresses the reciprocal interactions and influences between religion and civic engagement, challenging ignorance and prejudices while fostering mutual respect. Simply put, MY CANADA is about one's story and the ability to relay that personal narrative through a process of reflection and shared dialogue. It encourages young Muslims to distill and construct their life stories to better articulate who they are and what they represent. It is through articulating these stories that shared values can be discussed and brought to light, helping Muslim communities find common ground not only with each other but also with any and all communities that contribute to Canada's diverse population.

BEING CANADIAN MUSLIM
PART ONE

BEING CANADIAN MUSLIM



Introduction

The purpose of this project is not to define Islam for Muslim youth. Instead, it aims to capture the voices of Muslim youth defining Islam, discussing what their faith means to them, and exploring what being Muslim, being Muslim Canadian, or being Canadian Muslim means to them. This section of the toolkit focuses on the voices of young Muslims in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Edmonton, and Vancouver doing just that.

In a workshop setting, youth will watch a video entitled *The Common Ground* that is a nationwide documentary developed for this project. This documentary showcases the views of diverse Canadian Muslim youth on various topics like identity, faith, alienation, radicalization, and civic engagement. The purpose of this documentary is to understand the thoughts and opinions that Muslim youth throughout Canada have on these various issues, and it is a tool that will be used in the workshop to generate discussion and dialogue.

FACILITATOR NOTE:

Please have the youth at your local workshop view this short video. Introduce it as a video that looks at the views of diverse Canadian Muslim youth on various topics like identity, faith, alienation, radicalization, and civic engagement. The purpose of watching it is to stimulate dialogue and discussion. You will find a list of questions that you can use to help guide the facilitation. After the questions, you will also find a list of facilitator prompts you can use to help guide the discussions and relate them back to the video.

Questions for Dialogue

(Note: Choose one or two that fit your audience and start the discussion. You might also come up with your own questions for discussion based on what you saw as well)

How do you define yourself?

How do you feel about the way others perceive Muslims?

Do you feel a contradiction in being Muslim and Canadian at the same time?

Do you feel your parents understand your situation as a young Canadian Muslim?

Do you feel you belong to a Muslim community? How would you define belonging?

Do Muslims self-victimize, self-marginalize? If so, how can we address that?

What needs to be improved in our Muslim communities? Is there a common ground?

Canada is built on the principal of multiculturalism. Do you feel you belong more to this society because it's multicultural or does multiculturalism create marginalization?

Are Muslims isolated in Canada? Alienated?

Do you feel our religious leaders address our concerns as youth?

Do halaqas and khutbas at jumma prayer address the situations of Canadian Muslims?

As a Muslim woman, do you feel treated as an equal by Muslim men?

How do you feel when you hear the term "Muslim radical"?

What are your thoughts when you hear Islam and Muslims being associated with radicalization, extremism, or terrorism?

How effectively are our communities dealing with discrimination?

Do we islamicize social problems?

Facilitator Prompts:

- *From the interviews it seems that some Muslim youth do not feel an equal claim to public space and instead withdraw to Muslim-only space. How can we encourage feelings of belonging among alienated Muslim youth and encourage them to use public space?*
- *Disunity and conflict seem to be a source of frustration for many Muslim youth interviewed. How can we promote a change of focus towards major community issues rather than minor community differences?*
- *Some interviewees discuss fear of judgment as a barrier for them to get involved in their local Muslim communities. How can we as Muslim youth create more inclusive spaces for other Muslim youth?*
- *What is radicalization? Is it Islam that makes people bad or are there just Muslims that do bad things? Are people who do bad things, who happen to be Muslims, unfairly tied back to Islam?*
- *It is suggested in the interviews that radicalization is partially the result of a lack of outlets for expressions of legitimate frustration. How can mainstream Muslim youth create outlets for the expression of frustration that welcomes both mainstream and marginalized youth? How can interaction with non-Muslim communities also play a role?*

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
PART TWO

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Introduction

This section of the toolkit will build on what the workshop participants observed in the video, but will focus mainly on civic engagement. As the facilitator, you should read and be familiar with the two short articles (following the questions), written specifically for this project, regarding what it means to be civically engaged. Once you have read these, you should be equipped with enough information to be able to facilitate a session on civic engagement. One of the key things you need to focus on is how people can become civically engaged through creativity.

FACILITATOR NOTE:

The following questions will be useful to keep in mind when reading the articles. Write these questions on a whiteboard to give context and guidance to the discussions you will facilitate. Below you will find some facilitation questions you can use when conducting your local workshop. (Please see appendix one if you need a refresher on facilitation and leadership activities.)

Questions

- 1 Why are you becoming engaged?
- 2 To what end is this engagement?
- 3 What's the vision of our engagement?
- 4 What do we want to achieve out of it?
- 5 How are we going to achieve it?
- 6 Who are we going to engage?
- 7 How are we going to raise the civic value of our communities, our neighbourhoods, and our societies by the work that we're doing?

Questions for Dialogue

(Note: Choose one or two that fit your audience and start the discussion. You might also come up with your own questions for discussion based on what you saw as well)

How do you define yourself?

How do you feel about the way others perceive Muslims?

Do you feel a contradiction in being Muslim and Canadian at the same time?

Do you feel your parents understand your situation as a young Canadian Muslim?

What do you love or hate about Canada?

Do you feel you belong to a Muslim community? How would you define belonging?

Are you or would you like to get involved in a movement or cause? What is it about this movement or cause that motivates you to dedicate your time and efforts?

What needs to be improved in our Muslim communities? Is there a common ground?

Canada is built on the principal of multiculturalism. Do you feel you belong more to this society because it's multicultural or does multiculturalism create marginalization?

Are Muslims isolated in Canada? Alienated?

Do you feel our religious leaders address our concerns as youth?

Do halaqas and khutbas at jummah prayer address the situations of Canadian Muslims?

As a Muslim woman, do you feel treated as an equal by Muslim men?

How do you feel when you hear the term "Muslim radical"?

What are your thoughts when you hear Islam and Muslims being associated with radicalization, extremism, or terrorism?

How effectively are our communities dealing with discrimination?

Do we Islamicize social problems?

Facilitator Prompts:

- *Disengagement and withdrawal are problems highlighted in some of the interviews. How can involvement in the political process improve inter-community relations for Muslims and increase acceptance of Muslim needs in civic spaces?*
- *The idea of contribution through cooperation was brought forth as a way to improve the image of Muslims to the public, create understanding of Muslim ways, and demonstrate Islamic values. How can this be the middle ground between completely isolating ourselves and totally assimilating?*
- *How can mainstream Muslim youth create outlets for the expression of frustration that welcome both mainstream and marginalized youth? How can interaction with non-Muslim communities also play a role?*
- *How can Muslim youth engage society using creativity?*
- *How can civic engagement address some of the social issues that our communities are facing (Islamophobia, discrimination, unemployment, marginalization, radicalization)?*
- *Are Muslim organizations making positive change in our communities?*
- *If you participate in community work, do you feel it is nobler to help Muslims only or should you just be helping anyone in need regardless of faith/ethnicity?*

The Meaning of Civic Engagement

By Mustafa Farooq (Edmonton)

And support one another on goodness and Taqwa. And do not assist in the pursuit of evil and enmity. And have Taqwa of Allah. Verily, Allah is aware of all that you do.

- Surah Ma'idah, The Qur'an

What is Civic Engagement?

In defining what it means to be civically engaged, it is helpful to look at the roots of the words "civic" and "engagement". In Latin, the word "civic" comes from *civicus*, which means, "of a city". Engagement comes from the word *engager*, which means, "to be morally committed". In essence, then, civic engagement is the commitment of a person towards the broader community of his city.

Of course, in today's world where 1/6 of the world's population remains in poverty, civic engagement can mean something much more than a simple commitment to the people in one's city. Globalization, among other things, has brought the starving Ethiopian child to our doorstep. To be civically engaged means more than the improvement of our municipalities (this does not, of course, take away from the importance of improving our cities).

Many people conflate the terms "volunteerism" and "civic engagement" and assume that they have the same meaning. This can be misleading for a number of reasons. "Volunteerism", from the root word *voluntas*, means "will". In other words, volunteers "willingly" give up their time and effort for a specific cause. However, the difference here has to do with morality; there is nothing, at least etymologically speaking, that suggests that volunteerism is a "moral activity" in the same way that civic engagement is. To "volunteer" in the Soviet Union's Ukraine was to support the brutal activities of the dictatorship at the time.

Civic engagement, though, speaks to something far more powerful and meaningful. It is about being connected to our communities and understanding their needs, and working to fulfill those needs. Through this process of assisting our fellow community members, we further build that bond of connection, giving us further impetus to positively give back.

Civic engagement, then, can take any number of forms. It can take the form of stopping oppression, whether by physically stopping a bully or by speaking out against arms manufacturers. It can take the form of analyzing the community's needs through research and dedicated scholarship. It can take the form of directly assisting other fellow human beings and helping them cross the street. The defining feature, though, of civic engagement is that it is the moral connection between a citizen and his community, and includes all the steps he takes to further that connection and sustain it.

Do Muslims Have a Responsibility to be Civically Engaged in Canada?

Many Muslim scholars have argued that it is *only* in virtue of our civic engagement that we are allowed to benefit from the luxuries of living away from impoverished "Muslim" countries. That aside, though, it is evident from our mass corpus of scholarship that Muslims have a moral duty towards helping our fellow human beings. In fact, there are clear indications that Muslims have a moral obligation towards the welfare of animals; for

example, there is a famous *hadith* about the Muslim woman who was constant in her prayers and acts of worship, but ultimately went to Hell for mistreating a cat.

Some of your Muslim friends may not like the idea of being civically engaged. Not only is it a difficult and time-consuming activity, but the process of being civically engaged means creating moral connections between yourself and your fellow human beings, and some Muslims don't like the idea of creating such strong bonds between oneself and a "disbeliever". However, it is important to point out to these people that staying "morally committed" to the *civitas* includes feeding a non-Muslim when she has been abandoned or criticizing draconian immigration laws; at the same time, the same sense of moral commitment can drive a Muslim to discuss ideas, beliefs, and thoughts in helping out her non-Muslim sister.

Other Muslim friends that you may have might suggest that it is more important to be civically engaged with your Muslim brothers and sisters rather than your non-Muslim brethren. While it is definitely important to help out Muslims around the world, especially those in dire circumstances, this does not preclude the possibility of being morally committed to humanity in general.

In Canada, with steadily declining rates of volunteerism, Muslims have a strong obligation to help out our fellow citizens. Having received the numerous benefits of living in Canada, such as its excellent education system or relatively free health-care, it is indeed a responsibility of young Muslims to be civically engaged in Canada.

What does it mean to be a civically engaged Muslim?

To be a civically engaged Muslim can mean any number of things. Crucially, though, it should imply that Muslims be morally connected with the state of their communities and working to better that state.

There is an important distinction to be made. While some Muslims disregard the idea of civic engagement altogether in a "non-Muslim" land, others pervert civic engagement into something to puff up a resume or as a sort of "feel-good" exercise. It can be a difficult experience to step back from a project and ask, "Is this morally right? Will this be of benefit to my community?"

For example, many Muslim activists are involved in aid projects aimed at poverty reduction on a global scale. At the same time, many economists and political scientists question whether large-scale aid institutions actually make poverty worse by increasing the dependence of impoverished countries on aid. As a Muslim activist, you can be an agent of change who can step back from the picture and say, "We're using the wrong map." This does not mean that a Muslim activist cannot support aid or has to support aid, but merely that as Muslim activists we should be willing to interrogate our practices of civic engagement.

REDEFINING THE RADICAL: BROADENING THE DEFINITION OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

By Abdul-Rehman Malik (Toronto)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) brought a message of profound social change and social transformation. When we go back to what the essence of being a radical is, it is not the so-called "radicals" who blow up buildings and undermine human rights. To be a real radical in the best and positive sense of the word is to go to the root of things. Anyone who has been trained in community organizing, including the current president of the United States, will tell you that it was standard for them as community workers in inner-city Chicago (or anywhere else in the United States or beyond) to understand what radical action really meant. It means to go back to the root of things, to the essence of things, to re-connect communities to things that are genuinely, truly important.

When I look to the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and that early community, I see it as a project of radical transformation, of theological transformation, of social transformation, and the fact that the Prophet's mission was a mission of mercy. He was "a mercy to all the worlds." His behaviour was merciful, even in combat, even when he was confronting obstacles. He was truly committed to returning people back to the most important and essential roots of faith.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks who is the Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community in the United Kingdom recently wrote a book called *Radical Then, Radical Now* and he was talking about the Torah. He was saying that the Torah is a radical book because what the Torah says is that we are all equal before God. What the Torah says is that we need to take care of the most poor and disadvantaged amongst us. I see the Quran and the Prophet's message as a continuation of that divine revelation, especially when we see the way the Prophet dealt with the neighbour who was abusive to him, the way he dealt with the poorest in his community, the way he encouraged us in neighbourliness, saying, "If your neighbour remains hungry while your own stomach is full, there is something wrong with your faith. There is a weakness."

The Prophet said, "I came to do nothing but perfect good character." The Prophet said, "I'll tell you something that's even better than prayer and fasting. It's to be of service to other people." I mean, this is a man whose mission, and we believe divinely-directed mission, was to re-connect people to what is essential: the relationship with their Creator and amelioration of the difficult conditions of their fellow creatures.

So, I think, actually, that as Muslims, and this is something that we have been talking about in the work that we're doing in the United Kingdom, is to talk about redefining what it means to be radical. Redefine what it means to have a radical agenda. Because I, as a Muslim, believe that my faith, if I were to follow it the way I believe it deserves and demands of me to follow it, would give me no

choice but to dedicate my life and my soul to the amelioration of injustice, poverty, oppression, to raise the condition of people, to give and not to receive. This is the high moral conduct of the Prophet and his community. These are the emblematic principles of Islam.

In Islamic history we have something called *futuwwa*. *Futuwwa* is chivalry. It is service with disregard to yourself. It means that your pocket is open, that you have strength and discipline. Your discipline means you do service. It means that you are always on guard to serve other people. This is *futuwwa*. To know that even nature, even the animals have rights over you in terms of service. It is what is exemplified by the army of Solomon and the ants [in the Qur'an], the idea that there is even caring for the smallest creature in the natural kingdom. That's a pretty radical idea. So those Muslims who, in my mind, go around calling themselves or calling others to their "radical" interpretations of Islam are doing a disservice both to Islam and to the term "radical".

I think each and every one of us needs to see ourselves as individuals who are, if we are truly the people we say we are, committed to radical [i.e. essential, genuine, actual] social transformation. So we need to become the Transformers, not Decepticons of course but Autobots, and we need to then think of Islam and the advocacy of Islam. Our advocacy of Islam, our civic engagement, then, is about transformation. We are engaging, yes, as a measure of assistance to raise civic values, but the fact is that we must be committed to some kind of transformative social change.

Now, to the ears of some people that sounds dangerous. That sounds dangerous to some who see us as all "those Muslims". "We knew it all along," they say. "They listen to music. Some of them don't wear the *hijab*, some of them don't have beards, but they're into that 'social transformation'. What does that mean?" Call Glen Beck or Jonathan Kay from *National Post* and they'll tell you something different from what we mean. The truth of the matter, I think, is that if our faith does call us to a higher world purpose, then social transformation must go along with that. And the social transformation isn't for one community or for one group of people, it must be engaged with at a very public level. And that means there's going to be differences. There's going to be disagreements. But that's the nature of transformation. Transformation requires broad dialogue and it involves engagement.

Engagement isn't easy because you're going to break the plates. If we think civic engagement is like you go and vote, you do a little bit of charity work, "it's all good," no one's going to get angry at you, then we're not engaging.

Real civic engagement means that at some level there's going to be some kind of social conflict. Even with respect to what you would call prosaic, the day-to-day engagement, the day-to-day school, work, neighbourhood, street-level engagement. If you are committed to changing injustice around you, then you're going to break some plates. There's going to be some heat. There's going to be some tension. When we talk of civic engagement, maybe some of

that tension is going to be within our own communities. Maybe it means when you take on the leaders at the mosque, when you take on your local MSA, when you begin to challenge and ask questions and say, "Does this perspective jive with what Islam is saying? Let's look at it, let's talk about it." Well, dialogue is not easy, dialogue is difficult. And dialogue means that there's going to be some measure of conflict. If we want to civically engage, I think one of the things you have to keep in mind is that civic engagement is not a neutral exercise. Civic engagement means that you are going to come up against powerful opponents, obstacles, other opinions, and other perspectives. Being civically engaged means that the process of engagement has to be based on our understanding of why we are becoming engaged. Some of the questions we need to ask ourselves include:

- Why are you becoming engaged?
- To what end is this engagement?
- What's the vision of our engagement?
- What do we want to achieve out of it?
- How are we going to achieve it?
- Who are we going to engage?
- How are we going to raise the civic value of our communities, our neighbourhoods, and our societies by the work that we're doing?

That's hard work and you're going to break some plates. You're going to step on some egos, you're going to get angry, and there's going to be some tears. But that is the hard work of social transformation and social engagement. And any anti-racist activist, any gender activist, anyone who's worked on social justice issues knows that. This is where Canada is a remarkable resource. It is a remarkable resource because in our communities there are men and women, mostly who aren't Muslim, that are dedicated, committed, activated, and mobilized to make change.

How can we find our place alongside them? How can we become brothers and sisters "in arms" with them in the work that they are doing for our common good?

That's why I think *place* is so important, the idea of where you are. Ultimately, your work is going to be in a place. It's going to be at the level of real people, real egos, real hurts, real emotions, real loves, and real desires. That's the place where you're going to work. Understand the power of the place you're in. How do you mobilize the assets that are there? How do you create the solidarities necessary to achieve what you want to achieve. How do you make the case for achieving what you want to achieve? How do you come to a vision of what you want to achieve? How does your Muslim Canadian global political God-centred identity inform the kind of change that you want to make?

In the end, I come to three key questions:

- 1 **Rahma**, mercy, the emblematic principle of Islam. How are we guided by mercy and how do we enact mercy?
- 2 **Khidma**, service. Giving without expecting to receive, giving for a goal rather than for personal gain. How do we make our work service-oriented?
- 3 **Action**. How do we transform these high principles and this vision into actual actions? How do we make it happen?

I want to finish with a quote. I think in terms of a model of a radical, a good radical, I'm going to go back to Malcolm X. I think his life was so transformative. He was changing and evolving from where he came, from living with racist violence as a young man, from becoming a gangster, from going to prison, to becoming a member of Nation of Islam, to becoming a national Black figure, particularly interested in Black nationalism, from going to the height of transforming his religious beliefs into something more embracing, and then dying just as he was beginning to embark on a great project of bringing people together for the sake of civil rights and the human rights of African-Americans. In Malcolm X, you have an arc of a true radical, someone who is committed to social change. I just want to quote something from the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* which will explain, I think, this final point. From the last few pages of the autobiography:

"Only such real, meaningful actions as those which are sincerely motivated from a deep sense of humanism and moral responsibility can get at the basic causes that produce the racial explosions in America today. Otherwise, the racial explosions are only going to grow worse. Certainly nothing is ever going to be solved by throwing upon me and other so-called black "extremists" and "demagogues" the blame for the racism that is in America.

...

Yes, I have cherished my "demagogue" role. I know that societies often have killed the people who have helped to change those societies. And if I can die having brought any light, having exposed any meaningful truth that will help destroy the racist cancer that is malignant in the body of America—then all of the credit is due to Allah. Only the mistakes have been mine."

MEDIA RELATIONS
PART THREE

MEDIA RELATIONS

ADAPTED BY IRFAN CHAUDHRY BASED ON THE CCMW
MEDIA RELATIONS HANDBOOK



Introduction

This section of the toolkit will provide you and your workshop participants with the skills required to handle the media effectively. Through the use of interactive activities and examples, youth should become more prepared and confident when dealing with the media. Additionally, youth will be given the tools to effectively communicate online via social networking sites and will also be shown how to handle negativity and criticism on blogs and forums.

POSITIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

Muslims in North America are often the target of unfair representations in the media. At one time or another, there has been some kind of unfair coverage of Islam and Muslims living in Canada (such as the concept of *jihad* or the representation of women in Islam). Often, Muslims have been labeled as “fundamentalists”, “terrorists”, and “radicals”. Additionally, we seem to always hear the media suggest that Muslim youth living in North American are at risk of becoming “radicalized”, without further clarification or debate on what this exactly means.

Who is to blame for the inaccurate portrayal of Islam and Muslims living in Canada? Are we as Muslims responsible for this in any way? The answer is YES!

We as Muslims react only when the harm has been done. When there is misrepresentation by the media, we often don't involve ourselves in the debate, and when we are given an opportunity to participate, many of us lack the necessary skills to effectively engage with the media and positively educate media professionals about Islam.

We must make sure that when we are given the opportunity to represent Islam and Muslims that we represent our communities and not individual ideas. The media likes to focus on broad viewpoints and not individual thought.

When dealing with the media, we must show enthusiasm and commitment. Keeping relations open with the media is beneficial, even if we disagree with their outlook.

ACTIVITY ONE

Watch the following video entitled:

"The Happy Muslims Who Confuse You"

http://www.time.com/time/video/player/0,32068,19402457001_0,00.html

Discussion questions:

- What do you think about what you just saw? Do you agree/disagree?
- What can we as Muslims living in Canada do to address these stereotypical images of Muslims and Islam?

RULES ON EFFECTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

YOU are responsible for what is said about Islam in your local media. If you see something "wrong" with the news, don't see it as a media conspiracy against Muslims, see it as a challenge to correct the problem!

Be a news resource and not just a news source. Control the flow of information or it will control you.

Pitch, don't catch. We often wait for the media to approach us before we say anything. The media needs us for stories. Pitching good news stories about Islam and Muslims allows us to have some influence on what they report on.

Use larger stories or trends to your advantage. Is there international focus on the *hijab*? Write a piece about the *hijab* in Islam. Is there a lot of talk about Muslims being terrorists? Write an article that counters this viewpoint. Regardless of the current trend, FIND A WAY TO FIT IN!

Timing. Respond immediately if you see either a positive or negative news story about Muslims and Islam. Don't wait to be approached.

Call during off hours to build a relationship and not when the journalist is likely to be on a deadline. While they might not run with your story, by doing this, you are able to educate them about Islam and they will think of you the next time they need a quote for a news story about Muslims.

Don't Complain – EDUCATE!

BECOMING A NEWS RESOURCE

As a news resource, the media will want to call YOU first. To be an effective resource for media professionals, the following guidelines might be useful:

- 1 *Be truthful and accurate.*
- 2 *Be available when needed.*
- 3 *Be willing to do the "leg work" for journalists.*
- 4 *A legitimizing title or position provides strength to your position as a media resource. If you belong to an organization, make sure you associate yourself with this group to the media (i.e. Montreal Muslims Student Association - Media Relations).*
- 5 *Do the job properly, or find someone who is able to do the job properly and be committed. More harm is done through inappropriate handling of the media than no handling at all.*
- 6 *Turn negatives into positives. ALWAYS give a positive spin on events.*
- 7 *Work with the mindset that the media are ignorant and YOU have to EDUCATE them. Do this in a polite and down-to-earth way as arrogance will turn them off.*
- 8 *DON'T offer more information than is necessary. Keep it simple and address only what they are asking you.*

By doing this, you will avoid any chance for them to misunderstand and misconstrue what you have just said.

INTERVIEWS

Being interviewed by the media can be an intimidating experience, especially if you are camera shy! The following tips are useful to keep in mind when you are being interviewed by the media:

You are in control. They may ask the questions, but it is your answers that dictate where the interview goes.

An interview is not a conversation. Take as much time as you need to answer the questions. Don't rush because you have a microphone in your face.

Re-state. Repeat. Ask them to restate or repeat a question if you don't understand it. Remember, YOU are the expert in this situation and not the other way around.

The Rule of Three. Have three main points you want to get across in the interview and use these three points as an anchor during the interview.

Stop. When you have answered the question, stop talking. Most inappropriate things are said when trying to fill silence.

Don't Say "NO COMMENT".

NO COMMENT

One of the biggest mistakes that people make when dealing with the media is saying "no comment". This leaves the media with the impression that you are hiding something. This opens up the floodgates for them to interpret your (lack of) words and creates a higher chance that you will be misquoted. "No comment" allows the press to fill in the blanks.

PHRASES TO USE INSTEAD OF NO COMMENT

Instead of flat-out saying you have no comment (even when you quite honestly might not have anything to say about the topic), the following phrases can be a useful alternative to “no comment”:

“I will need some time to look over the issue before I make any comment, but what I can say is [fill in the blank].”

“That is a question that is probably better suited for [fill in the blank].”

“I’d suggest you speak to [fill in the blank] for an answer to that question as they are more [knowledgeable/experienced/responsible] on that issue.”

BEING MISQUOTED

One of the biggest accusations a person or group can make against a media outlet is being misquoted. One of the main ways to avoid being misquoted is to UNDERSTAND what is being asked. Often, we blindly answer questions when we have a mic and camera in our faces without really understanding what is being asked. (Refer back to the interview tips section for how to handle interview questions.)

WHEN DOES BEING MISQUOTED HAPPEN?

When journalists are in a hurry or lack information

When journalists have to rely on THEIR own interpretation of YOUR verbal remarks because you did not answer a question clearly

When reporters are ill-informed or ill-equipped to cover stories about Islam

When the media don't understand the many facets and nuances about Islam and Muslims

When the reporter or news outlet has a tendency to look for sensationalistic and exaggerated news angles

HOW CAN YOU AVOID BEING MISQUOTED?

Issue a prepared statement and stick to it. Corporations, entertainers, and the media use these, so why can't we?!

Develop mutual trust. Misquotes are often the result of a mutual mistrust between two parties. By appearing open, honest, and respectful, the media will rely on your voice and will value what you tell them. Remember, they need YOU for their story.

Have a designated spokesperson. This allows for the media to have one person they can always contact and ensures that the message being sent is consistent, accurate, and reliable.

Be clear and concise. Avoid technical language and speak in a way that everyone can understand. This limits the degree that the reporter can misinterpret what you have said.

Plan ahead. If it is a phone interview, ask for the questions ahead of time. If you know why the media wants to speak with you, do a little research. Don't go in there blind. Be available, be objective, and don't take issues personally.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE BEEN MISQUOTED

Cool down. Don't do anything until you are over the flush of anger you feel.

Is it that bad? Think of the misquotation in perspective and see how damaging it is to your story or viewpoint. If it's not too serious, it might be better to forgive and forget.

Make contact. If you feel that the misquotation is fairly severe, contact the reporter who made the error to get a better understanding of how this might have happened. Contact the editor if the reporter seems uninterested or unwilling to discuss things with you.

Use a credited voice. Is there someone you know that has a fair bit of clout that you can work with? Sometimes someone with a valued title may be able to get the response you need.

Higher level. If you don't get feedback from the reporter or editor then you may have to take things to a higher level. Only go this route if what was misquoted involves a severe defamation of character or was something that was greatly taken out of context. Contacting the publisher is one option, but you can also consider contacting the press councillor ombudsman (for print) and the CRTC (**Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission**) for radio and television.

ACTIVITY TWO

Using the skills you learned above, break into small groups and develop five interview questions. After you have developed these questions, role play an interview scenario. The following topics (some contentious) might help you in developing your questions:

(FACILITATOR'S NOTE: DIVIDE GROUPS TO HAVE SOME ROLE PLAY A GOOD INTERVIEW AND SOME ROLE PLAY A BAD INTERVIEW. HAVE A DEBRIEF SESSION AFTER ALL GROUPS HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO ROLE PLAY).

Why do some Muslim women wear the *hijab*?

Why do Muslims not eat for a month?

Why do you never hear of Muslims denouncing acts of violence or terrorism?

I always hear the term "radical Muslim". What does that mean?

MEDIA EVENTS

News about Islam in your community should not "just happen" – you have to make it happen. Much of the news that we hear, see and read is a result of media events. These are pre-arranged activities designed to attract the media and convey a particular message to the public. As Muslims, we have a few built-in media events, including:

- *The month of Ramadan*
- *Eid (ul Fitr and ul Adha)*
- *Jummah prayers*
- *Activities which tie in to international news (aid projects to 3rd world countries, food bank events, etc.)*

The following checklist is useful to keep in mind when organizing a media event:

REMEMBER THE 5 W'S AND THE H. It is vital to address the who, what, when, where, why and how when creating a media event.

BE VISUAL. Make sure you build visuals into your event. The media are very visual and giving them a unique photo or filming opportunity will add value to your event.

TIME. Timing is everything! Hold your event during a time period when the media is more likely to come. Hold events in the morning between 10 AM to 1 PM and in the evening between 7PM to 8:30PM. Invite the media to come during these times. They probably won't stay for the whole thing, but if they are given these timeframes to attend, they are more likely to run with the story for the 6PM or 11PM news.

LINK LOCAL TO GLOBAL. Local media like local stories that tie in to international events. See how you can fit your event to a broader international story.

ESTABLISH A MEDIA GO-TO PERSON. Designate one person (no more than two) to be the spokesperson for the event. Make sure that person is articulate and not shy of the camera.

PREPARE A NEWS RELEASE. Send your news release about the story well in advance of the event. This gives the media more time to discuss possible angles for your story and increases the chance that they actually show up. Follow up with those who received the news release a week before your event.

ACTIVITY THREE

You are organizing a fundraiser to raise money for a developing country. Using the above checklist, how would you create a media event and how would you get the word out about your event? Be specific about how you would address the items mentioned in the checklist.

NEWS RELEASES

News releases are the basic means of communication between organizations and the media. Much of the news we see and hear began with a news release.

A good news release reads like a good story and is built like an inverted triangle with the important facts at the top and the details below. The less rewriting it takes to use your release, the more likely it will be used.

Reporters feel more confident using material from people who are good writers.

Tips on Writing a Good News Release

Use a catchy headline that conveys something of the local, interesting, or significant aspects of the story. ALWAYS use a headline if you want your news release to be read.

Type the release using double spaces or a single space with a wide margin.

Be clear. Be concise. Your news release should not be more than ONE page. Half a page is ideal.

Avoid rhetoric and inflammatory language.

Give facts and not just opinions.

Include a contact number where you can be reached at all times.

End the news release with -30- which indicates the end of the material to be used.

MAKE SURE you send the releases to the right people. See the resources section for a list (i.e. a daybook editor).

Follow up with the places you have sent the release to in order to answer any questions they may have.

OPINION PIECES

Opinion pieces can have an impact on the public debate on any issue. To make effective use of the editorial pages, an organization should:

Contact the editor to find out the specific requirements and guidelines on opinion pieces of a given newspaper.

Read the opinion pages of the newspaper you want to submit to in order to get an idea of the articles they are publishing.

Scan opinion pages and be prepared to react quickly to offending articles.

Be concise and focus on your issue. Keep articles to no more than 800 words.

When writing an opinion piece:

Stress local impact and relevance.

Address humanitarian concerns.

Take a contrary stance to a major issue.

Invoke the authority of a historical figure.

Keep in mind that a high rejection rate is common. Major newspapers receive an average of 250 articles a day. KEEP TRYING!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR/EMAIL TO THE EDITOR

Letters/emails to the editor are designed to address just ONE idea. Letters to the editor can be used to:

React to inaccuracies of a news story

Provide a voice for a segment of the community that is rarely heard from

Add a different angle to a story

React to an editorial

Letters to the editor are a quick and easy tool for those who don't have the time to write a full opinion piece. Keep in mind that **most letters to the editor don't get published**. To increase your chances of being published, you might want to keep the following things in mind:

100-150 words MAX!

React quickly. If possible, have the letter to the editor submitted on the same day the negative article appears. Reference the original article and date.

Appear authoritative. Speak on behalf of an organization (even if you have to make up the organization).

Pick one main thought and stick with it.

Address the letter to “Letter to the Editor”. Be passionate. Be controversial. Be Tactful.

Show support. Write letters of appreciation to the editor as well as criticism.



ALTERNATIVE PRESS

Student and Community Publications

Community newspapers as well as student-run newspapers offer excellent opportunities to write about issues that affect Muslims in Canada as well as to get your article published and read. Community papers are interested in issues that relate to a certain community.

Most of the time, the editors of these papers will run the article “as is”, mainly because they don’t have the time or resources to research and write about all the events happening in the community. Community and student-based newspapers want and appreciate contributions, so try and find a local newspaper and start to contribute!

NEW MEDIA

Watch this video entitled: **SOCIAL MEDIA REVOLUTION**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIFYPQjYhv8>

BLOGS

Blogging can be a powerful alternative to traditional and mainstream print media, if used effectively. Blogs are useful because in addition to text, they can embed pictures, videos and links, allowing the reader multiple formats in which to consume the article. The blogger and reader can also interact directly via a comments/response section available below most blogs.

Blogging allows you to engage with your audience in fast, honest, two-way conversations. Specifically, a blog might be used to:

- Share new information quickly
- Demonstrate passion about a topic or cause
- Market a new campaign, organization, or cause
- Effectively engage an audience
- Counter traditional media coverage
- Put a human voice on local, national, and international events

Before starting a blog, you should keep the following things in mind:

Objective and audience. What are you writing about? Who are you writing to? This is the most important step. By identifying what you will focus on and who your audience is, you avoid getting your message lost in all the blogs that are out there.

The blogger(s). Identify who will do the main writing for the blog (if it is an organization). This could be an individual or a team. If it is a team of bloggers, make sure they take on different issues in order to keep your content fresh and to avoid repetition. The important thing is to make sure the blogger(s) are knowledgeable, passionate, and committed!

Keep it coming. Ideally, a blog should have three to five new posts a week to keep people interested, and for them to know that this is an active blog. Think about what you want to talk about and create an editorial calendar of what you want to discuss on the blog for that month. This will keep things concise and will allow you to build on previous posts.

ACTIVITY FIVE:

View some blogs that youth (or you) might follow. What makes this a good blog? Why do you follow it? Below are some examples to get you started:

To create a Facebook group, go to <http://www.facebook.com/groups/create.php>

Maintain your Facebook group. It is important that when you create a Facebook group you maintain it. Often, you'll find that out of the 30 or more groups that you belong to on your own Facebook profile, few of them seem to be active (even though they have a decent amount of people in the group). Maintain your Facebook group by posting on its wall or engaging the group members in discussion. Additionally, you can send out messages to all group members and you can even create events that your group is hosting and invite the group members to attend. Regardless of whether or not people are responding, it is important that you appear active and make people feel like they belong to a group that is actively pursuing its initiative.

Less is more. Be careful to not overkill your group and send out TOO MUCH information. It will annoy people to the point of removing themselves from your group. Appear active, but be tactful in your approach. Posting a new video, link, blog post, etc. every hour is definitely more than the average person can consume and might lead to overkill. However, posting a new video, link, blog post, etc. once every few days (or about 3 times a week) allow your group members to consume what you have shared in a more effective way and not lose the overall message of your group's initiative.

Facebook groups vs. Facebook pages. Facebook groups are great for organizing on a personal level and for smaller-scale interaction around a cause. Facebook pages are better for brands, businesses, bands, movies, or celebrities who want to interact with their fans or customers without having them connected to a personal account, and have a need to exceed Facebook's 5000-friend cap.

TWITTER

Twitter is fairly new to the social media scene and can be thought of as both a social networking and a micro-blogging service that allows users to send and read short text-based posts. Each "tweet" is limited to 140 characters and is a great way to quickly update people on what you (or your group) are up to. Twitter allows you to have fast and direct communication with people based on the premise that the people you are trying to communicate with also use Twitter.

Some common uses for Twitter include:

Tweeting news about yourself [your group, your initiative] in short and manageable pieces

Sending updates from events you [your group] are at

Sending questions to your followers on Twitter for immediate feedback

The following tips will allow you to tap into the power of Twitter and effectively use this social networking site to your advantage.

Get started. Set up a Twitter account that reflects your group or initiative's name. If you want to have multiple people in your group tweeting on your behalf, create an account for each of them, but follow a common theme (i.e. FirstNameLastname_MYCanadaProject).

Build your network. Let people know you are on Twitter. Post your Twitter name on your blog, website, Facebook group, etc. and invite people to join you. You can also use a tool called a TweetScan to search for people on Twitter who have mentioned something that might relate to your initiative. Alternatively, if a person starts to follow you on Twitter, follow them back! Not only is it good social media etiquette, it's also a quick way for you to build your followers. A larger network means that a larger amount of people are seeing your message.

Tweet. Once you have your Twitter account set up, start tweeting! Start off with an initial tweet about what your initiative is about. Tweet regularly, but don't over-update.

NEGATIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

What to do when things go bad.

Negative Relationships

A negative relationship between the media and a community often occurs when the community avoids the media, doesn't inform the media accurately, or hides information. Most reporters approach a story in an objective way and just want information to allow them to gain a better understanding of an issue. Muslim communities get frustrated when the media portrays them in a negative light, so they tend to vent their frustration directly at the media, which leads to Muslim groups being alienated from the media discourse. The solution? **Be tactful and informative NOT defensive and aggressive.**

Why are Muslims and Muslim organizations a little hesitant to deal with negative news about Islam? Consider the following quotations:

“It’s hard to redo what’s already been published. It will only confuse people on the issue more.”

“There is no point in trying to correct the issue or asking for a correction. It only makes things worse.”

“It’s an uphill battle, but we must fight negative coverage with positive stories.”

“Negative media stories are rarely made positive by responding to them in the media. It only adds fuel to the fire.”

The above quotations give the impression that it is easier to give up and not say anything than to take a little effort and stand up for Islam when there is a negative story about Muslims in the media. It is important to remember that these quotes were said at a time when the Internet and social networking sites were just emerging. Although these sentiments might still be present today, with the prevalence of the Internet and social networking sites such as YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, and Twitter, the broadcast power traditionally reserved for the media is now in the hands of everyone with an Internet connection.

Use this broadcast power to your advantage and counter negative stories about Islam in a positive way!

Handling Negative Comments on Blogs and Forums

Be in the know. Always know about negative comments. This is as easy as scanning your blog or Facebook group/forum. This is the best way to know about all comments, including all negative comments.

True or false? Is the negative comment true? If it is not, then a polite reply to the blogger with factual clarification should work. Additionally, if you are the moderator on a blog/forum/group, you can remove the comment from the discussion if you deem it serious enough.

Answer honestly. If the post is true, then honesty is always the best policy. The goal is to respond in a way that is honest yet effective. Ignoring the post or providing false information will only add fuel to the fire. Additionally, you can offer to take the comments via email to avoid a

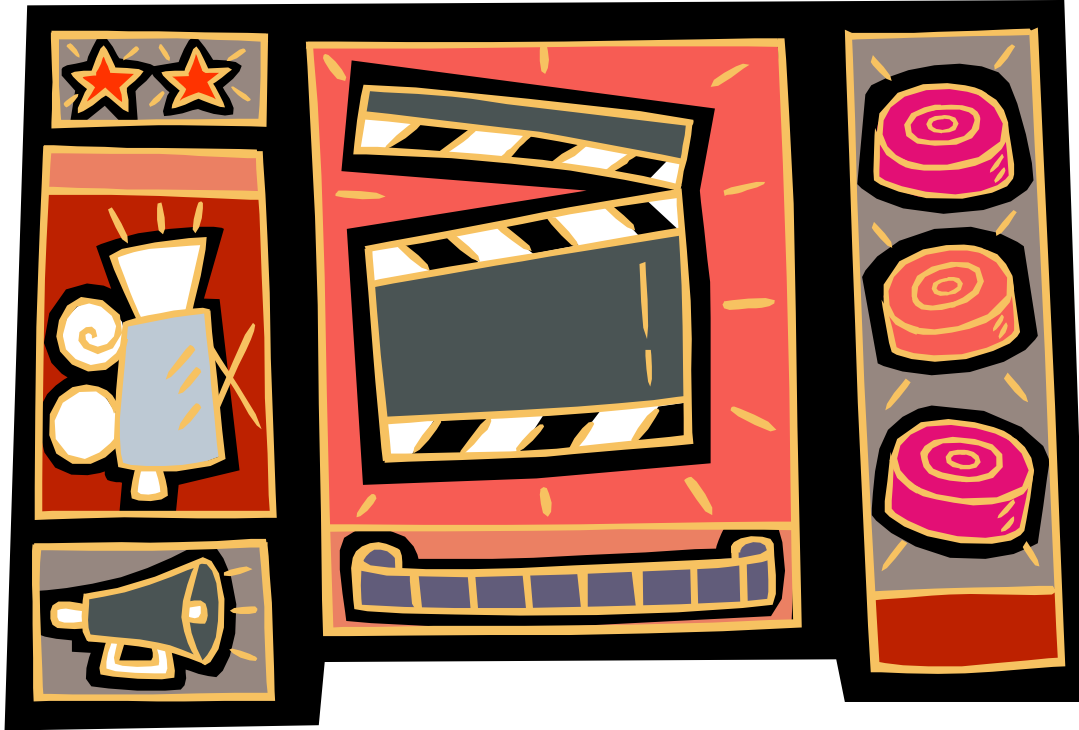
constant back and forth on a blog post. This effectively takes the negative conversation offline.

Thank the person who posted the comment. Thanking the blogger is a polite way for you to regain control of the situation and provides you with the chance to openly communicate about the subject. Here is a perfect opportunity to turn a negative into a positive. The blogger can just as easily post a positive comment as they can a negative. By thanking the blogger, you are accepting their important role in the world of social media, and also send an important message to other people who might be following the thread.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION AS
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
PART FOUR: FILM

FILM MAKING AS A TOOL FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

WRITTEN BY IRFAN CHAUDHRY (EDMONTON)



Introduction

Movie making is a creative way to express an idea and entertain people. As a tool, a movie can both entertain and educate an audience. Most people, however, think they do not have the necessary skills or knowledge to make a movie and often shy away from even trying. This section of the toolkit will provide the user with some simple and quick tips on what to keep in mind when you want to make a movie and convey your message. Additionally, this section will show the user how to develop a strategy that allows them to share their movie beyond the computer screen. This section will be broken up into four parts: pre-production, production, post-production and small-scale distribution.

1. PRE-PRODUCTION

Idea/Concept

Not surprisingly, the first thing you need before you can even think about making a movie is an idea! Consider the following things when you are trying to brainstorm some ideas:

What really bugs you?

Is there an issue you want to explore?

Is there something you want to learn more about?

What are some issues that people have strong opinions about? Can you find a middle ground? Can you show both sides of the story?

Is there something that is affecting your community that everyone seems to be talking about?

How do current events affect you/your surroundings?

ACTIVITY ONE

Go around the room and have participants shout out some ideas that they think would make a good movie. Write these down on a whiteboard. You will come to this again during the section on storyboarding.

Movie Style

Once you have figured out what the idea/concept of your movie will be, you will have to figure out how you want your movie to play out. Will a documentary style be the most effective way to get your point across or can you get creative and make a comedy movie that highlights the issues you want to focus on? Choose the style that you feel most comfortable with and go with it! Some common movie styles that people can try when making their first movie include:

Drama: A slow-paced movie that is driven by the characters and their interactions. If you enjoy writing and storytelling, this might be the best medium for you as you need to write a good script to keep the audience watching!

Comedy: Probably the most difficult style to pull off for amateur movie makers, but the most rewarding if you can pull it off. You will need characters that can really act and also have a script that will make people laugh.

Documentary: The safest route to go if you are a first time movie maker. A documentary can take many forms, but the most common form is an interview style where one subject or a few subjects discuss a common theme, and as the movie maker, you create a narrative from their comments. These run the risk of being boring if they involve a simple question-and-answer scenario, but with some interesting use of the camera as well as editing, you can make the scenario come to life.

ACTIVITY TWO

Ask participants to name various movies they like and what category each fits. Ask how and why these fit the above categories as well as what element stuck out the most that allowed it to fit the chosen requirement.

Storyboard

Once you have your idea and concept down, you will need to storyboard some ideas in terms of what scenes you want to shoot, where you want to shoot, how many people you will need for each shoot, as well as what scenes will best tell your story. It is also at this point that you will want to set a goal in terms of how long your movie will be and try to stick to it! For first time movie makers, a movie that is 5 to 7 minutes long is a good start.

A storyboard can be developed in many ways. Some people use a blank piece of paper and create six boxes (panels) representing how they want each scene to progress. As you go through each box, your story evolves and you get a better idea of what scenes you will want to shoot and how you might want to shoot them. At the end of this section, you will find an example of a basic storyboard template you can use.

Subjects/Characters

One of the main things you will need to keep in mind during the pre-production phase is who you will use to tell your story. If you are going to film a documentary, who will you approach and utilize as interview subjects? How many people will you need to interview? Where will you find these individuals? Are you going to consider one viewpoint or multiple viewpoints? Will they be comfortable with you using what they say on camera?

If you decide to make a drama or a comedy, you will need to find some actors—namely, some of your friends who don't mind being on camera. How many characters will you need to tell your story? Is your central character likable and can people relate to him/her? If you are writing a script, you will always have to keep in mind who your characters will be and how they will relate your story to the audience.

Location

You also have to think about where you are going to film the scenes from your movie. You can usually utilize a natural setting for an easy backdrop to your movie, but you can also stage certain places (or even a friend's house) to look like a film set for a few hours. Regardless of where you decide to film, you should keep the following things in mind:

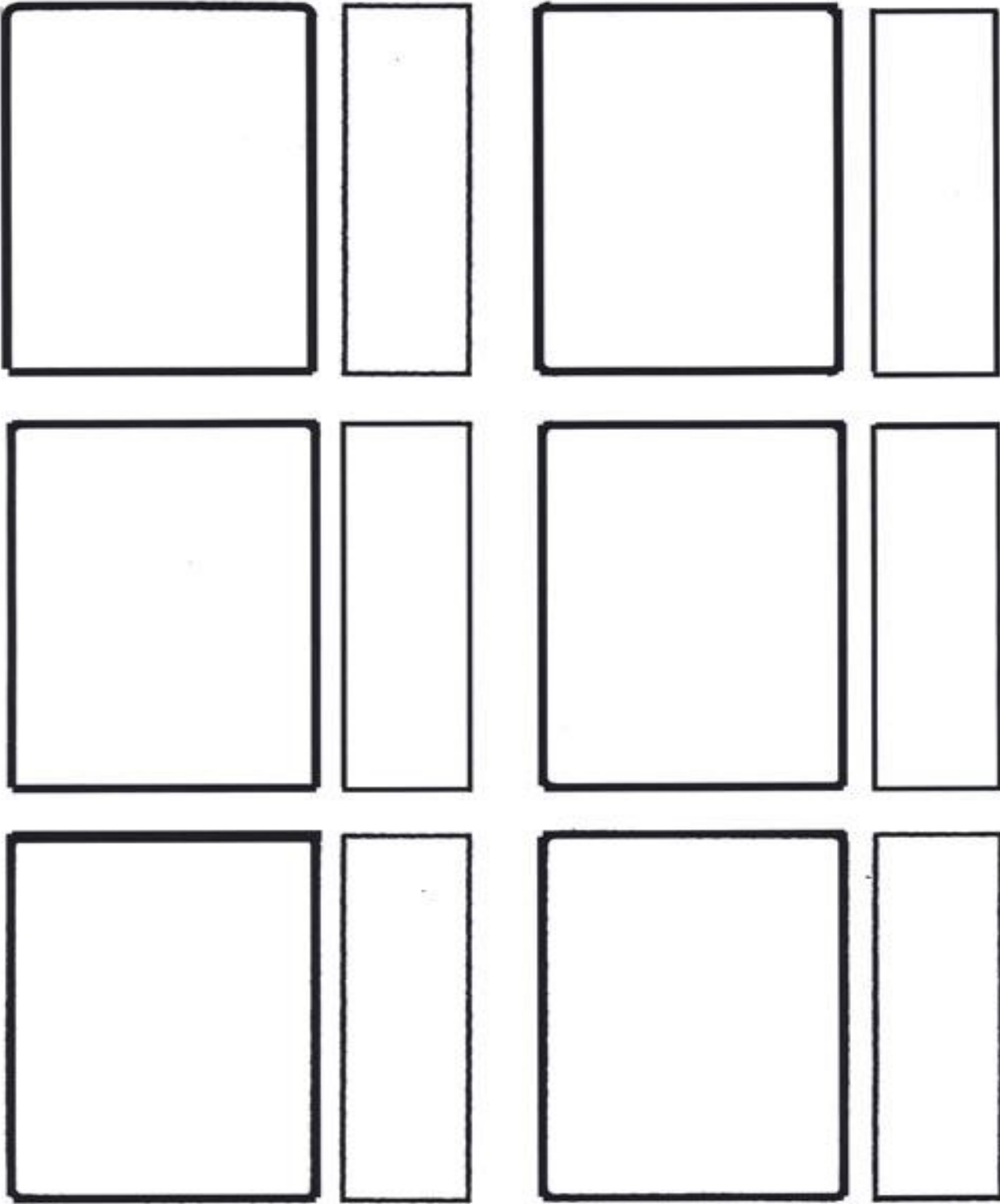
- Will I need permission to film in this location (i.e. if it is in a coffee shop, mall, or other private space)?
- Is it a quiet location or is there a lot of background noise? Will this noise interfere with what my characters/subjects are saying?
- Is the space too dark? Too bright?
- If I want to film something outside, is the weather okay? Is it too windy? Too sunny?
- Do I have a back-up location in case I can't film outside?
- Will people or items in the background distract the audience?
- Is the background appropriate for the context of the scene?

It is important to keep these things in mind before you start filming, so that when you are ready to film, you can spend more time on capturing your story rather than looking for a place to film. **YOU WILL SAVE TIME!**

ACTIVITY THREE

Using the storyboard on the opposite page, have participants break out in groups and give them 15 minutes to create a scene based on some of the ideas you discussed in the first activity. The below should be included:

- **1 central character**
- **1 rival to the central character**
- **A minimum of 2 locations**
- **A situation they are facing**



STORYBOARD - 6 PANEL

©1999 INDIAN KEY FILM SOFTWARE, WC

2. PRODUCTION

Now that you have your story, your characters, and you have storyboarded some of the scenes you want to film, you can finally start to film and bring your idea to life! Production deals with one main thing—making your movie.

For most people new to film making, the biggest misconception is that you need a fancy and expensive camera to make a movie. While that might be nice to have, most of us can't afford one. We all, however, have access to some kind of a camera that is capable of recording digital video. Depending on what you want to film, you might even be able to shoot your whole movie on a digital camera (using the movie function). The following movie did just that:

BORN INTO POVERTY

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9z3PwglGx4>

Don't let not having a fancy camera and expensive equipment limit your potential. Use what you have, and if you keep the following things in mind, your movie will look the best it can with the equipment you have!

Tips to keep in mind when filming:

USE A TRIPOD: This makes for steady shots.

DO NOT ZOOM: Sometimes it is tempting to zoom into a shot, but unless there is a reason to zoom (i.e. to show emotion or a facial expression), don't do it!

CAMERA POSITION: Make sure the camera is close enough to the scene without getting in the way. This will give you the best shots when shooting characters and will also pick up the sound you want.

FRAMING: Make sure that the shot is straight and there is nothing in the background that might distract the audience.

TEN SECOND RULE: Hold the shot for 10 seconds before the scene and 10 seconds after the scene. This will help you during the editing process.

SOUND: This is the most ignored aspect for first time film makers, but it is the most important to consider. If you can afford it, use an external microphone to connect to the camera. This will give you better sound and is more effective than most built-in camera microphones. If all you have is the built-in microphone, just make sure you are close enough to the characters you are filming for the camera to pick up what they are saying.

USE HEADPHONES: Most cameras have a headphone input—USE IT! This will allow you to make sure sound levels are okay, and you will be able to pick up sounds that you might not hear with your ear.

LIGHTS: Make sure you have enough light for your scenes. It is difficult to increase (or decrease) lighting during the editing process if you have bad lighting to begin with. If shooting outside, be aware of where the sun is and make sure it is not a distraction during your shot.

3. POST PRODUCTION

So you have finished filming the scenes for your film. Now you have to edit it together and really make your story come to life. Nowadays, most laptops and home computers come with basic video editing software. Most of these are very easy to use and you can find “how to” tips for most of them online. Most computers using the Windows operating system will have WINDOWS MOVIE MAKER already on their system. The following link will be useful if you use this program:

<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/moviemaker/default.mspx>

Users operating on a MAC platform will have access to iMovie. The following link will be useful if you are using this program:

<http://www.apple.com/ilife/imovie/>

Other (more advanced) video editing software packages include:

Adobe Premiere/Premiere Elements, Sony Vegas, and Final Cut/Final Cut Pro.

Regardless of what editing program you use, the following tips will help you save time while editing your movie:

Watch your footage – What you watch now is actually the film you made (and might be different from what you planned).

Take notes – Is there one scene that you really want in there? Is there something that doesn't make sense? Notes will help you make sense and remember what you want to include and delete from your movie.

Organize your clips – This is extremely important when you are making a movie. Organizing your clips allows you to easily go back to the shots you want to include in your film and exclude the ones that might not make sense for the film you are making (i.e. it might be a good shot and a good interview/scene, but in the context of your film, it is out of place).

Make a rough cut – Once you have an idea of what clips you want to use, edit a rough cut of your movie and show a few people. Ask them what they saw (rather than you telling them what they should see). Keep these comments in mind when you go back to edit a final cut of your movie.

Final cut – Once you are happy with your rough cut, you can sit down and fine-tune your edits with the appropriate transitions and video effects.

Music – Music helps to set scenes and can also run the pace of a movie. Make sure the music is not louder than the dialogue. You also have to make sure you have permission to use the music. One alternative is to use music that is licensed under a CREATIVE COMMONS licence, like the ones available at: <http://creativecommons.org/legalmusicforvideos>.

4. FINDING AN AUDIENCE

The easiest audience you can find to show your final product to is your family and friends. Invite a few people over to your home, make some popcorn and have everybody gather around to watch your big premiere. Before the Internet, this might have been the only place people could have watched your movie. However, nowadays, this is just the beginning.

ONLINE

Websites such as YouTube and Vimeo are the most popular in terms of uploading your movie to the Internet and sending a link for people to

watch. You can even upload a movie to your Facebook profile or Facebook groups you belong to and have users of that online community view what you made. You will have to register and have an account before you can post your movie, but most sites allow you to join for free (for a basic account).

Links:

www.YouTube.com

www.Vimeo.com

The following website gives you a comprehensive list of sites similar to YouTube and Vimeo:

<http://www.reelseo.com/list-video-sharing-websites/>

PUBLIC SCREENING

Another avenue to consider is to have a public screening at your high school or university campus, public library, or other public venue. If your movie is only 5 or 6 minutes long, try and encourage some of your friends or class mates to also make a movie on a similar theme and you can all screen your movies at the same time. **If 5 people made 5 movies that were 5 minutes long each**, that's about a half an hour's worth of movies that people could watch in a public setting. This would allow people to discuss the different things they saw on screen and it could really turn into an event!

One thing you can do to get people to make a movie on a similar theme is to organize an event where people are encouraged to submit a film on a certain topic and you can hold the event in aid of this topic. For example, if you wanted to raise awareness about environmental concerns in BC, organize an event where the theme is about the environment.

If you want to raise awareness of a marginalized group in your community, organize an event in aid of this community and ask members of this community to submit a movie where they can tell their stories. You will get more of an audience. One example where this model has been used with some success is www.mosquers.com -- a Muslim film contest where participants show their films at an awards night, complete with prizes and a trophy (a "Mosquer" Award).

CREATIVE EXPRESSION AS
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**PART FOUR:
PHOTOGRAPHY**

PHOTOGRAPHY AS A TOOL FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

WRITTEN BY SHANELE SOARES (TORONTO)



PHOTOS IN THIS SECTION COURTESY OF MUNTAKA SHAH (EDMONTON)

Types of Photography

There are many forms of photography that are commonly used today. There's commercial photography in which photos are used to highlight a product or service, usually seen on billboards or in magazines. Then there's portrait photography, which refers to photos used to beautify a model or actor. Both commercial photography and portrait photography require a lot of equipment (camera body, camera lenses, flashes, lighting set-up and more), but what kind of photography can someone do on a budget?

Photojournalism

Photojournalism (photographic journalism) is the art of capturing a whole event in a single photo. Photojournalism can be seen in newspapers, magazines, books, and flyers. It's everywhere! From pictures of survivors of the Haiti earthquake to soccer fans celebrating at the Fifa World Cup, if the photo is *real* (not posed, with real people and not actors) then it's photojournalism.

The greatest challenge of photojournalism is getting the *right* picture at the *right* time. Imagine you're downtown when a fight breaks out

between two people; one wearing a red shirt and the other wearing a blue shirt. Because you saw the whole thing, you know that the person in red started the fight and the person in the blue is only defending himself. You take a photo. In your photo, you captured the person in blue punching the person in red. The only problem is, now it looks like the blue shirt is the 'bad' guy, when really it was the person in red! The best photojournalism shows one or two pictures that explain the entire story *truthfully*.

The Impact of Photojournalism

Photojournalism has an incredible power that many people don't realize. "A picture says a thousand words" is a very famous quote and it's completely true. Powerful photos can bring tears to eyes, smiles to faces and melt even the hardest of hearts. A powerful photo can change someone's opinion, make someone care, and inspire people to bring about change. Photojournalism is all about showing the public what you think they need to know. The best way to do this is through a *photo essay*.

A photo essay is like a comic strip, only it uses photos instead of drawings. Photographers will pick their best photos from an event and then place them in chronological order. This shows the viewer how the event started, what happened, and then how it ended, making your message more powerful and informative.

Some photo essays cover a single event, like a concert downtown. Some photo essays cover a period in a person's life; for example, a photographer might follow a subject for two weeks and show the best 20 photos to demonstrate what life is like for him or her. Some photo essays can cover multiple people who have something in common. Really, it's up to you to decide what to photograph and for how long. Just know what it is you want to show before shooting!

Uses of Photo Essays

This is 100% up to you. If there is something out there that you think more people need to know, get a camera and start snapping. There is no topic or issue that's too small! There are photo essays on daycare workers, drug addicts, armless war victims, students, teachers and more. Viewers want to experience something they haven't, so if you can provide them with that then you're set.

What Makes a Good Photo?

1) Plan ahead: Careful thought before taking a single photo can make all the difference. Imagine you're going to a riot. Before you even get to the riot, you know that a lot of people will be coming and that these people are very passionate. With this information, you can plan ahead to get a photo where you show how large the riot is and also get a photo where a subject looks very passionate. This will help organize you when your mind is preoccupied with all the action going on.

2) Get close: The closer you are to the action, the better your photo. When you're *really* close, the viewer can read the face of your subject and will feel emotionally attached to him or her. No one cares about a face they can barely see!

3) Get the emotion: The human face is a spectacular storyteller. Even if a subject isn't doing anything but listening to someone else talk, the subject's face will show exactly how they feel about the speaker and the topic being discussed. Capturing emotions right as they happen will pull your viewer into the moment!

4) Get people used to you: When you first start photographing something, people will be nervous and won't act naturally in your photos. A good way to deal with this is to introduce yourself so you're no longer a stranger and to take extra photos at the beginning, so people quickly get used to you and forget you're even there!

5) Learn your camera: You actually don't need an expensive camera to take good photos. As you can see, good photos depend more on what you're taking a photo of than what you're taking a photo with. *But* it's still important to understand what your *aperture*, *shutter speed* and *ISO* are, so you can manipulate a photo to look exactly how you want.

Tips for Reaching Out to People with Your Work:

- 1) Start small:** Your first photos most likely won't end up in *TIME* magazine. Start small, search for small local papers (school newspapers, etc.) or online news sites and build your resume and skills from there. Don't get discouraged.
- 2) Showcase them yourself:** Make some prints of your photos and ask your school or community centre if you can show them on display.
- 3) Start a website:** Facebook fan pages, Blogger, Flickr; all free sites that allow you to post photos!
- 4) Know your audience:** Find a newspaper or magazine that would be interested in the photos you take. For example, if you do a photo essay on seniors, a magazine geared at young people probably won't be interested in your essay.



CREATIVE EXPRESSION AS
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
**PART FOUR: PEOPLE'S
JOURNALISM**

PEOPLE'S JOURNALISM AS A TOOL FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

WRITTEN BY STEVE DA SILVA (TORONTO)



Introduction

The contents of this guide are based on the experiences of building BASICS – a working class community-based media organization currently based out of Toronto. In four years, our organization has developed a bimonthly newsletter (BASICS Free Community Newsletter) producing 6-10 thousand copies per issue and growing; a weekly radio program (Radio Basics); a website (basicsnews.ca); as well as working with and supporting numerous campaigns and community-based organizing initiatives.

It is important to note that our level of development after four years would not have been possible had we not deployed a tried and tested organizing methodology for mobilizing and organizing working-class people. *Step-by-Step: A Brief Guide in Mass Organizing* is our guide to organizing and should be referenced to better understand how to create self-reliant peoples' organizations.¹

A truly pro-people media project must not only address itself “to the people”, it must also be “from the people”. In other words, such a media project must not only address itself towards and elevate the struggles of

¹ This document was adapted from *Step-by-Step: A Brief Guide in Organizing Migrants*, available on the [website](#) of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development.

the people, but also include them in its production and expansion. Building community-based and community-controlled media projects is necessary in a society where the media, as well as nearly all of society's productive wealth, is massively concentrated in the hands of corporate monopolies. Media reflects the interests of the people who own and control it. Hence, we should not be surprised if the majority of Canadians do not see their interests reflected in the corporate media. In other words, media is *always* propaganda – it is never *class neutral*. The only question is what class interests a particular media is reflecting. This is why a working-class people's media must actively encourage an ever-broadening base of participants in its work.

BASICS is currently in the process of developing a School of People's Journalism (SPJ) that will run workshops and create guides to the various aspects of grassroots journalism.² This guide only addresses some of the most essential aspects of beginning such a project. It is hoped that the forthcoming SPJ project will provide media activists and community organizers with more skills.

1. Technical Requirements: Design, Layout, Editing, Writing

Any group of activists looking to begin a community media project will have to devote at least a couple individuals to developing basic skills in layout (Adobe InDesign or Scribus), graphics (Adobe Photoshop or Gimp) and word processing. You will also require at least a few writers for your publication that may or may not be members of your organization. You will need to be conversant in Photoshop or Gimp to edit and prepare images for print, and you will require InDesign or Scribus to lay out your publication. More advanced skills will be accumulated with time once you have generated interest in your work. You may also want to start a blog using wordpress.com or blogspot.com to post and archive your content.

2. Social Investigation: Identifying the struggles and concerns of the people

A genuine pro-people newspaper places the interests of the broad majority ahead of that of a narrow self-aggrandizing minority. What will distinguish such a newspaper from the rest will be the reporting on issues that affect the broad majority, which other newspapers, especially the large media monopolies, will not report on or will only report in a way that is filtered through their own class perspective.

The means by which community media activists ascertain the issues of concern for a given community involve **social investigation** within it.

Social investigation (SI) can consist of reading reports by NGOs or government agencies, doing door-to-door surveying, interviewing residents, calling fact-finding meetings, and keeping track of interesting anecdotes gathered from community members. In essence SI is fundamental to know the situation, conditions, issues and problems confronting the people in a given neighbourhood or sector. Using social investigation to know the conditions of the people is not done in one sitting. It is a process that continues throughout and after the creation of any organization. Solid social investigation will be the basis for producing a newspaper that truly speaks to the interests and concerns of the people.

3. **Political Education:** Strengthening the unity of an organization

An essential component of building any organization is developing an internal political program to assist the membership in developing a common political line. Rather than the editorial line of the media organization being subject to the whims of the editor(s) or editorial committee, the content of the paper should reflect a set of principles debated, agreed upon, and routinely studied by the membership.³ If the content of the educational program reflects the interests of the people, it will elevate the quality of the membership, assist in the development of new organizers, and generate new and higher qualities of leadership.

4. **People Power:** Elevating the organization of the people

A small group of activists or community organizers looking to build a mass-based community media project must creatively embed their project into the community they are developing in. There are many ways this can be done:

- 1 Seek submissions from community members;
- 2 Hold community fundraisers or public events around issues of concern to build the profile of the organization;

³ In BASICS, for instance, it is required by all members to study the following topics: basic political economy of capitalism and imperialism, class structure of Canadian society and

- 3 Develop a sustainers base from community sources, as opposed to relying on external sources that may compromise the social direction of the project (foundations, agencies, government);
- 4 Actively canvas and work with the community in question when producing media content;
- 5 Increasingly include the broad masses of people in other aspects of the production and distribution of the media project.

In short, a genuinely pro-people media organization must actively encourage a broad participation of the people in the organization, developing an ever-broadening base of participants in the work and members in the organization.

5. Self-Reliance and Solidarity

It is critical to establish self-reliance in constructing any people's organization. External funding, such as government or foundation grants, always comes with strings attached. A heavy reliance on advertising may also compromise your principles, if not create a dependency that hinders self-reliance.

If your media speaks to the broad interests of the people, means can be found to generate a base of support among the people for your project. If you wish to keep your project truly independent of compromising social forces, you must establish a self-reliance from those forces, which is to say, a reliance on the community or class you are appealing to.

On this basis, it will be possible to form relationships of solidarity with people's organizations and community groups that respect your orientation and wish to contribute to it.

This guide is only intended as a rough outline of the essential elements of building genuine community media organizations. Those interested in exploring in greater detail the topics of community organizing, the history of BASICS, or more detailed guides to people's journalism are encouraged to visit our website www.basicsnews.ca. It is particularly essential for community organizers to study *Step-by-Step*, which can also be found on our website. A history of BASICS leading up to formal launching of our organization is forthcoming and may be of interest to many new community organizers. Our constitution can be studied as a concrete

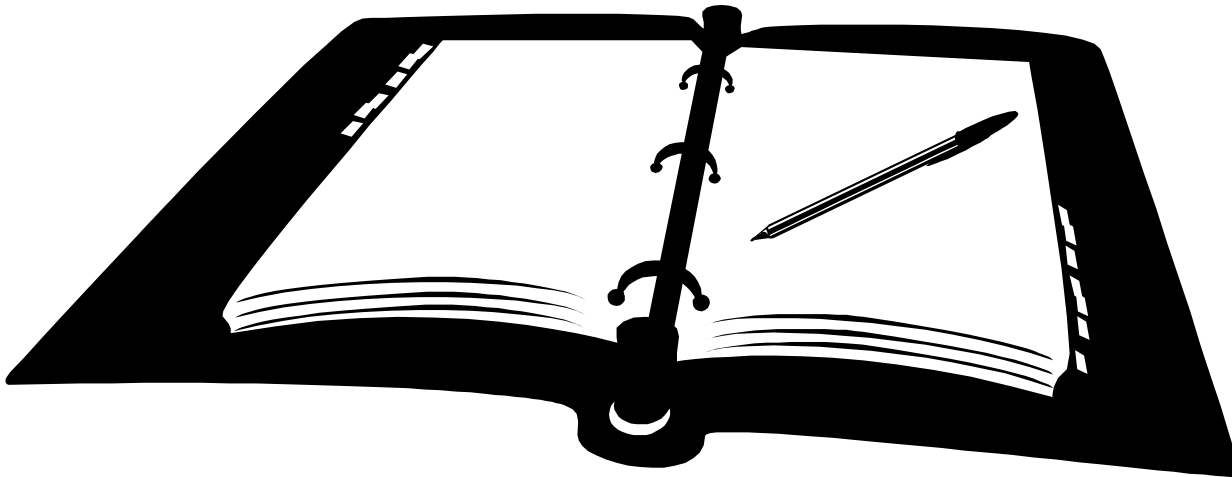
media organization. Finally, community media activists should look out for launching of the School of People's Journalism, which will begin producing guides to people's journalism sometime in the second half of 2010.



CREATIVE EXPRESSION AS
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
**PART FOUR: CREATIVE
WRITING**

CREATIVE WRITING AS A TOOL FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

WRITTEN BY MEDINA FARIS (TORONTO)



Creative Writing

"Let me tell you a story." I've heard this countless times and I'm sure you have too. Whether or not the tale that follows proves at all captivating or meaningful to me or you is immaterial. Every story has some motivation behind its narration. It may not be a noble motivation or a lucrative one, but the telling of a story is more often than not an attempt to convey a message. That message could be trivial to an audience or vital, but it always has significance for the teller.

The success of the story relies on the ability of the storyteller to find the right medium to deliver his or her message, to find the right words to encode that message and most importantly, to make that message matter to an audience. In other words, a key responsibility of any storyteller is to invest his or her story with a theme that is easily accessible to his or her audience. The theme is always there, it's an essential component to any story. However, if the audience fails to recognize the theme of the story, it becomes ineffective as a message, whether its primary purpose is to educate, to entertain or both.

We all receive thousands of messages a day from ads, signs, texts, bills, etc. Unlike many of the daily prosaic messages we receive, creative

expression does not impose information on us or demand action from us. It can inspire us to action, but only really demands thought as a prerequisite. It does not impose others' opinions on us as much as it encourages us to develop our own opinions and takes us further on the path to self-knowledge as we do so. It is unique amongst the messages we receive in that even though the storyteller infuses it with meaning, we can choose what a story will mean to us.

It is because of this freedom of interpretation we are granted that creative expression is absolutely essential as a tool for civic engagement. It is inclusive and accessible by nature. As well, it is dependent on a relationship between a writer/narrator and the public. Both sides have roles to play in the origin and proliferation of creative expression. Both sides have the equally important task of making meaning for themselves while at the same time attempting to understand each other. Unlike a political campaign or a press release, creative expression is subtle and even while it's public on some levels, it is still private on others. We are allowed to understand it privately and at the same time often encouraged to engage with it publicly in classes, book clubs, online message boards, etc. Having the option of understanding a message privately as well as publicly, independently as well as part of a group, reduces the didactic effect of many forms of creative expression even while their creative element increases their enjoyability. It is through this leveling out of sorts that creative expression is not forced to simply educate or entertain. It can serve both purposes. In fact, when it does, its message is delivered in a more powerful way than if its purpose was to just attempt one or the other.

Additionally, it is clear to see that creative expression, both the expression of it as well as exposure to it, is a valuable way to gain self-knowledge and to know your fellow human beings. Whether your audience is a readership/viewership of 500 people or consists of only yourself, framing your thoughts in words can give you personal clarity, psychological relief and validation that your own actions and thoughts have a place and purpose in life, they come from a source -- that they're not just fragmented phrases, they are actually significant ideas if you can learn to give them the shape they need to be understood. If you choose to then share your personal writing, you put your ideas out into a community and you can learn through reviews or comments how other people relate to the ideas you put out. You can learn how others are the same or different. It's a chance for you to share and compare perspectives with a wide range of people and build bridges between diverse peoples based on shared human characteristics and emotions.

Sounds good, right? And yet it is not as easy as it sounds, I know. You can have the best of intentions, but when it comes to making the time and effort to share yourself with yourself or others, there are any number of hurdles in place that make it difficult to transform an idea into a reality.

Advice for New Storytellers

On Finding Your Reason

The number one roadblock to overcome along the way is an overwhelming feeling of insignificance that many writers experience while trying to write. You might wonder why it matters what you think and what the point is of telling yourself or others that it does. If you find that's the case with you, give yourself a reason to write – any reason. Whether it involves telling a child a story to put it to bed at night or keeping a journal to see how your perspective on life changes over the years, impress upon yourself that you are writing for your own benefit or for someone else's benefit when you start out to do so.

On Finding Your Voice

Don't even worry so much about producing a story or poetry right away if you are unused to writing fiction. Creativity will come easier once you discover a "voice" for your writing that feels natural and once you learn to express yourself honestly. Keep in mind also, that it's easier to write privately if you're just beginning because you are less likely to distort your thoughts and your writing style in an effort to appeal to other people. You are also less likely to feel like your ideas are insignificant if you don't have to worry about sharing them with others when you're starting out.

Saying What You Mean

Another roadblock to creative expression is the inability to express yourself the way you would like. Your words are not saying what you mean. This is a form of writer's block. There's no simple solution to this problem. If you find yourself a victim of this, the best advice I can give is to read something you normally wouldn't or to put the books away if you're too immersed in them. *Refresh your mind.*

Continue to Build Your Vocabulary

I don't mean that you should read the dictionary necessarily, but discover new words by asking the people around you to explain things you don't understand. Even if they don't give you an exact definition or a complete clarification of what they are trying to say, pay attention to the way they try to make you understand.

Pay Attention to Form and Style

Sometimes you fail to make your meaning clear because you don't understand things like form, meter, narrative voice, punctuation, etc. as well as you should.

Read Your Writing

Get used to reading your writing out loud and pay attention to the way it sounds.

Consult Style Manuals

Check to see if some technical editing might help you get your meaning across.

Find a Fresh Perspective

Get someone you know to edit your writing and give you notes. Discuss it with him or her and see if they have any problems understanding what you were trying to convey.

Most Importantly, Keep Trying

The more you attempt to share your thoughts, the easier it will be to express them once you begin to understand yourself and your medium better.

Dealing with Criticism

You might find yourself up against some sharp criticism once you are comfortable enough to share your writing with others on a consistent basis. Keep in mind why you began writing and don't let criticism deter you from keeping it up. Try your best to learn from any criticism you get and make an effort to improve your writing skills. Learn to be your own critic and to decide whether someone makes a valid critical observation about your work or if they're really only sharing an unjust opinion. More often than not, when people make valid criticisms of your writing, it's not personal. Those criticisms most likely don't even apply to your ideas themselves but to the organization and presentation of those ideas. Console yourself by reminding yourself that criticisms of your writing are most likely the result of technical flaws in your work that can easily be corrected. There is no idea so inferior that it can't be received well once it is put into the right words and organized effectively within a relevant context.

Managing Expectations

Remember, above all, that if writing is an avocation for you, there is no pressure on you to produce Nobel Prize winning material. Writing should primarily be a means of self-exploration for you and possibly a means of participating in a community, depending on whether or not you intend to share your work. Do not torture yourself with unreasonable expectations or morbid fantasies of failure. Relax, move at your own pace and take pride in whatever work you produce.

PRACTICE

The following activities may help stimulate some ideas for you to get started. Some of them can be done independently while others require a group of interested writers.

Guided Free-Writing. Free-writing can be a good way to loosen up writing inhibitions and get you to produce some quick work. Sometimes people experience writing paralysis when they try to get their thoughts out because they expect it to come out perfect the first time. Take 15-20 minutes, use a "found object" if you prefer (it can be any random item you see) and write about it. The idea is to keep your pen/pencil from being idle even for a moment. Don't stop to think. If you can't think of a word, write about how you can't think of a word. Just keep the flow of words coming. If you want to take less time, take 10 minutes...or 5. The point is to write without pausing to critique. This is a good exercise to help you discover a writing voice.

Re-Writing. Take a short work of fiction (like a fairytale) and re-tell it from a different perspective. The point of this activity is to get you to think creatively while keeping all the pressure of creating an original plot at bay for a while. You can do this in a group of four, script it, and act it out if desired.

Independent Study. Study a form of poetry (even if it's as simple as a haiku). Read about it, learn how to write it, read samples of it, then experiment with it yourself and see what you can come up with. Don't beat yourself up if you can't get it to sound right at first. Try again.

Improvisation. Tell a story as a group. One person can start off with a sentence, the next can contribute another one and so on until everyone gets a turn and the story comes to an end.

LEADERSHIP:
FACILITATION 101
APPENDIX ONE

LEADERSHIP: FACILITATION 101

Introduction

This section is meant to empower youth with information they can use to inform a certain kind of leadership. The information in this section is geared towards promoting the kind of leadership amongst Muslim youth where they become more confident, skilled communicators and facilitators of communication.

Our model of a leader for the purpose of this project is the leader as facilitator. In other words, wherever the word "facilitator" appears, you can substitute the word "leader" to understand what kinds of qualities and style of leadership this project requires its participants to learn and embody. The Muslim communities, in all their diversity, are currently saturated with partisan Muslims competing for religious authority. To address the kind of tribalism that is divisive and inhibits civic engagement, one of the current urgent needs being reported by all of the Muslim communities consulted across the country are young people who are non-partisan as well as excellent communicators who can heal wounds in the community, who can bridge gaps by facilitating community conversations, and who can open thoughtful, constructive dialogue between diverse people in their communities. For some Muslim youth who are aspiring leaders, this will come more easily than to others. In any case, practice makes perfect.

Leadership: Facilitation 101⁴

To many people, learning takes place in a school where the teacher stands in front of the class, presents information, and calls on students to answer questions. This traditional hierarchical model assumes that the teacher is the authority and the source of knowledge. Her task is first to fill up those "empty vessels" (i.e. the students) and then evaluate them on how much information they retain.

A horizontal rather than hierarchical educational methodology (where the learner, not the teacher, is at the centre of the experience, and where everyone shares ownership of the group), is more effective for

⁴ Material here is drawn in part from *In My Own Skin: Canadian Muslim Women Creating Our Own Identity*. Leila Bedeir, ed. Gananoque, ON: Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW), 2001.

young and adult learners alike when dealing with issues of a personal nature. The word "facilitator" is more appropriate than "teacher" in this context, as all concerned are peers engaged in a common effort towards a shared goal. Together, they analyze experience and seek to come to individual conclusions about it.

The goal is not to find the "right" answer or even come to a consensus, but to collaboratively explore an idea or issue that can be acted upon individually or collectively.

Such collaborative methods are increasingly used throughout the world. Their democratic structure engages individuals and empowers them to think and interpret for themselves. Because it assumes that everyone has the right to an opinion and respects individual differences, this type of methodology has proven especially effective in the discussion of sensitive issues. It encourages critical analysis of real-life situations and can lead to thoughtful and appropriate action.

Mastering the art of facilitation, however, requires both a clear understanding of the goals and methods involved as well as practice.

What a Facilitator IS⁵

A facilitator uses a pedagogical style that accomplishes the following:

Establishes a collaborative relationship with participants, in which the facilitator is "first among equals," but responsibility for learning rests with the whole group;

Helps to create and sustain an environment of trust and openness in which everyone feels safe to speak honestly and differences of opinion are respected;

Ensures that everyone feels included and has an opportunity to participate;

Provides a structure for learning, which may include setting and observing timelines for the discussion and keeping the group on topic;

Ensures that the practicalities are attended to, including set-up of the meeting space, notifying the participants, and seeing that everything required is prepared for the session.

⁵ CCMW acknowledges with thanks the Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI) / Institut pour la solidarité internationale des femmes (ISIF) for the permission to draw upon the following publication for this section on group facilitation: Flowers, N. *In Our Own Words: A Guide For Human Rights Education Facilitators*. Bethesda, MD: Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI), 1999.

What a Facilitator IS NOT

The facilitator does not take on a role as any of the following:

The person in charge: The whole group is responsible for learning; the facilitator's role is to ensure that learning happens most effectively.

A lecturer: The facilitator is rather a co-learner exploring the subject as an equal partner and contributing experience to that of others.

An expert: Though they need to plan for each session, facilitators may not know as much about a subject as other members of the group.

The centre of attention: A good facilitator generally speaks less than other participants, drawing them into the discussion.

An arbiter: In collaborative learning, no one, least of all the facilitator, determines that some opinions are correct or more valid.

The maid: While facilitators take initial leadership in coordinating the sessions, they should not become the only person who takes responsibility. In a true collaboration everyone takes part in the dynamics, including those who are "difficult" or "unpleasant".

What Makes a Good Facilitator?

Some qualities of a good facilitator, such as personal sensitivity and commitment, depend on the personality of the individual facilitator, but experience and awareness can help everyone improve these skills:

Sensitivity to the feelings of individuals. Part of creating and maintaining an atmosphere of trust and respect is an awareness of how individuals may be responding to both the topics under discussion and the opinions and expressions of others. Discomfort, hurt feelings, and even anger are seldom articulated; most often a person will silently drop out of the discussion and sometimes out of the group. Sensing how people are reacting and knowing how to respond to a particular person or situation is a critical skill of facilitation.

Sensitivity to the feeling of the group. In any group, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and group "chemistry" generally reflects shared feelings: enthusiasm or boredom, involvement or detachment, interest or restlessness, calm or anger, trust or suspicion, gravity or silliness. Being aware of the group's dynamic and understanding how to respond is crucial to skilful facilitation.

Ability to listen. One way the facilitator learns to sense the feelings of individuals and the group is by acute listening, both to the explicit

meaning of words and also to their tone and implicit meaning. Facilitators generally speak less than anyone in the group. Often, the facilitator's comments repeat, sum up, or respond to what others have said.

Tact. Sometimes the facilitator must take uncomfortable actions or say awkward things for the good of the group. The ability to do so carefully and kindly is critical. The subject matter of the breakout sessions may evoke strong feelings and painful memories. The facilitator needs particular tact in dealing with emotional situations respectfully and sometimes firmly.

Commitment to collaboration. The process of collaboration can occasionally seem frustrating and inefficient. At such times, facilitators can often experience the temptation to take on the easier and familiar role of teacher, leading rather than facilitating the group. However, a genuine conviction about the value of cooperative learning and the empowerment it can produce will help the facilitator to resist a dominating role. Likewise, the facilitator needs to be willing and able to share facilitation.

A sense of timing. The facilitator needs to develop an instinct for timing: when to bring a discussion to a close, when to change the topic, when to cut off someone who has been talking so long that others are not able to talk, and when to let the discussion run over the allotted time.

Flexibility. Facilitators must plan, but they must also be willing to jettison those plans in response to the situation. Often the group will take a session in an unforeseen direction or may demand more time to explore a particular topic. The facilitator needs to be able to evaluate the group's needs and determine how to respond to them.

A sense of humour. Even in a serious endeavor, an appreciation of irony coupled with the ability to laugh at oneself and to share the laughter with others, can enhance the experience for everyone.

Resourcefulness and creativity. While the breakout sessions provide practical outlines and questions for discussion, each group is as different as the people who make it up. A good facilitator uses the set format where possible but is also expected to adapt the material to fit local conditions. Facilitators may draw on the talents and experiences of people in the group and the community. Participants may also want to contribute quotations, poems, songs, and other resources from their personal experience.

Self-Reminders for Facilitators

Be very clear about your role. Your behaviour, more than your words, will convey that you are also a learner and that this is not a traditional teacher-student situation.

Be aware of your eyes. Maintain eye contact with participants in a way that makes them comfortable. If you sense a participant is uncomfortable with steady eye contact for whatever reason, lower your gaze or shift it elsewhere respectfully by turns as appropriate.

Be aware of your voice. Try not to talk too much or too loudly.

Be aware of your body language. Consider where you sit and how you may unconsciously exercise authority.

Be aware of your responsibility to make sure everyone is included. Each member of the group should have a chance to be heard and should be treated equally. Encourage differences of opinion to be expressed but discourage argument, curb those who incline to dominate and draw in those who are tentative or shy.

Be aware of when you need to give structure to the discussion. Explain and summarize when necessary, decide when to extend a discussion and when to go on to the next topic, and remind the group when they get off topic.

Be aware of your power and share it whenever possible. Share tasks like note-taking, timekeeping and, ideally, leading the discussion.

Icebreakers/Energizers

The following are suggestions for short and simple ways to introduce participants to each other and help them feel more comfortable with the group. While most of these exercises are good icebreakers for the beginning of a session, some can be introduced at any time as energizers as well.

First Impressions. Ask participants to stand and introduce themselves by saying their name and completing the following statement: "Something you wouldn't know about me just by looking at me is..."

This can help lead into a discussion about the difference between appearance and reality, stereotyping, and prejudice.

Climate Assessment. You can form a "whip". This consists of asking participants to stand and go around the group with everybody simply saying the "most important word" describing their current feelings.

This can enable participants to see that they are not alone in their feelings; it can break their isolation. It can be done multiple times in a longer breakout session (perhaps halfway in and at the end) to see if there has been a change in "climate" or if certain individuals need more or special attention.

Self analysis. Seat participants in a circle. Ask participants to give their names and respond to one of the following questions:

"If you were an animal which animal would you choose to be and why?"
"If you were a song which song would you choose to be and why?"
"If you were a character from a book, film or TV show, who would you choose to be and why?"

This can lead into a discussion about identity, belonging, community, segregation and alienation.

ACTION PLANNING
APPENDIX TWO

ACTION PLANNING

The following action-planning tool is meant to help youth leaders develop an idea for civic engagement into a feasible plan that meets the objectives and expected outcomes of the Muslim Youth Canada Project.

MY ACTION PLAN

Workshop Facilitator #1: _____

Workshop Facilitator #2: _____

What is the topic of our workshop?

What is the objective and desired outcome(s) of our workshop?

How will our workshop encourage civic engagement?

How long will our workshop be? (e.g. Full-day: 9:00-4:00, 7hrs + 1hr lunch? Half-day?)

Who is our target audience?

Where will we find our audience?

How will you reach your audience (e.g. phone, email, Facebook, Twitter, posters, flyers, etc)?

How many participants will there be? (There should be 20-30 minimum)

Venue choice 1: _____

Venue choice 2: _____

Identify local community partners and organizations that you would like to involve in the planning of the workshop (At least one local partner should be a non-Muslim organization and at least one should be a local Muslim organization):

Identify potential guest presenters that would be a right fit for the workshop (e.g. subject experts, advocates, artists, performers, etc.):

What stationary material would you need?

How will you evaluate the workshop?

How will you follow up with the participants after the workshop?

NEXT STEP – MY TIMELINE & CHECKLIST

Fill in the blanks below by inserting the date on which you anticipate to complete the following checklist items.

1. The first meeting with my partner(s) to discuss our next steps will be on

2. Check-in with our steering committee mentor/the project coordinator every 3 weeks, starting from the date of our first meeting. List the all dates in chronological order below:

2. Contact local organizations and arrange meetings on how we can partner with them to develop the workshop by: _____

3. Contact the potential presenter(s) and confirm his/her attendance by:

4. Create a marketing plan by: _____

5. Confirm a venue by: _____
6. Design and complete all marketing material by: _____
7. Create a distribution list by: _____
8. Finalize a registration process and create a registration form by:

9. Finalize and submit a workshop outline to the project coordinator to review no later than: _____
10. Must obtain the approval of the CCMW's National Board and local chapter by:

(Note: the date should be no more than two weeks after the outline has been submitted)
11. Complete all distribution of marketing material and registration forms by:

(Note: approval of the workshop must be obtained before any material can be distributed)
12. Design and finalize the workshop agenda by: _____
13. Prepare the workshop material and any handouts by: _____
14. Design and finalize an evaluation form by: _____
15. Meet with my partner(s) and steering committee mentor/project coordinator to finalize the details of our workshop on: _____
16. Deliver the workshop by: _____
(Note: the workshop must be delivered between September and December 2010)
17. Complete a follow-up with the participants by: _____
18. Prepare the workshop report, including the workshop evaluation by:

(Note: the report must be submitted to the project coordinator by January 31st 2011)

MY STORIES
APPENDIX THREE

MY STORIES

This section is a collection of stories and experiences of the youth interviewed in the companion video to this manual: *The Common Ground*.

Alykhan Kaba – Vancouver

My name is Alykhan Kaba. I am a business student at UBC. I am specializing in Marketing and International Business. From there, I hope to go on to a career in brand management, but I've considered management consulting recently. I was born and raised in Vancouver. I grew up in East Vancouver which was like an inner-city part. I liked it a lot. I think it has a lot of character and I like telling people I'm from there. It's really not that bad and it kind of makes me happy. I'm used to walking down the street and having homeless people ask me for money. When other people see it sometimes, they think there's something sketchy about it or they feel sorry for them. To me, they're like my buddies. I can talk to them on a regular basis. We'll have solid conversations. Most people can't do that, so coming from that environment had a lot to do with why I can. I think it's really given me a lot of perspective into where I am now.

My experience as a Muslim is probably different from the experience of a lot of people who are Muslim. When I became involved in the Ismaili Muslim community, I felt like I was living a double life in the sense that I would go to school and have my school friends (I was the only Ismaili at my school) and then, in the evenings, I would go to Jammāt Khana and I would have different friends there. We would chill and talk. When I told my school friends about it, they would be like, "Oh, you're so religious. You go to this place to pray." In reality, I think that's, like, 10 minutes of it. The rest of it, I'm just talking with my friends and we're planning social events. To some people, it's like, "Oh, you're doing all these great things. You're planning all these events for your mosque." But it's just for us to chill. It seemed like a lot of my Ismaili friends could relate to my experience because they were going through the same things. When I became more involved, the double lives started to overlap.

My non-Ismaili friends started to meet my Ismaili friends. I felt like my double life was becoming more integrated. I felt like there was no boundary between my secular life and my spiritual life. I think I like that a lot because it's a fusion between these two worlds where you can't have one without the other. I think that when you're living your secular life, you should always be thinking about your spiritual life. There are people who

aren't interested in creating a fusion between the secular and the spiritual and who see the spiritual as something that needs to be done rather than something that needs to be lived. It is different for each person. Islam is a very personal thing, that's one of the great things about it. For me, living both lives parallel with each other works. For other people, it may not.

If I was the brand manager of Islam, I would tell all of my employees to be your own ambassador. As someone who is working within this organization, I would say, "I am a Muslim. These are the things that I do." That way, you are directly marketing yourself and saying, "I am not ashamed of who I am and I'm proud of what I do. These are the things that we do and let me tell you more about it." Direct contact with people is the only way our image is going to change. Things can happen that don't usually happen when you step out of your comfort level and advocate for who you are.

What's exciting to me about Islam is the diversity. There is such a plethora of culture and tradition. There is one side of a spectrum that is completely one way and there is another side of the spectrum that is completely another way. Even when you look at people within a specific tradition within Islam, they will have completely different views. I think that's something that should really be embraced rather than frowned upon. I know some people who would think of it as a weakness because there's no core identity, but people like me see it as a strength.

Think of it as an investment portfolio. When you invest in one stock while the market goes up and down, all you have is that one stock. That one stock will go up or down. But if you diversify that portfolio and you invest in a series of stocks, you're minimizing your systematic risk. When you look at Islam and all the different branches of it, that's Islam diversifying itself. When the markets go up and down, there are branches that will go up or down. I think that ensures that anybody can find a place in it. I think if I was the brand manager and I wanted to do something that would get me attention, I would try to think of an event that would exhibit diversity and make it known to the public that this is something cool that we're doing. We have a lot of culture to share so why not share it?

Boonaa Mohammed – Toronto

My name is Boonaa Mohammed. I actually thought about changing my name at one point in my life, but it's probably too late now. I'm 22, but I'm turning 23 soon. I go to Ryerson University. I'm an exiled Oromo living in Canada. Oromos are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia and, due to

political issues, we've been forced to flee. Thus, I grew up as a Canadian in Canada. I'm still trying to figure out what it means to be Canadian. I run workshops with young kids across the city and I've asked that question, "What is Canadian?" or "Who is Canadian?" When people ask me where I'm from, I say, "I'm from here. I was born in Toronto, so technically, I'm Canadian." But, unfortunately, for some people, it just doesn't make sense. We're not what Canada thinks of itself. I think when we think of Canada, we think of *Corner Gas* or the CBC or *Hockey Night in Canada*. These are things which I never personally related to. Even the discourse around what is normal really comes up because when you talk about "what is Canadian," you're talking about who is the status quo, who are everyday people? But if you look at the changing demographics of Canada, the three biggest cities (Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver) are overrun with immigrants. So we're not a minority. In some places, we're a majority. And second of all, unless you're of Native background, you're not really Canadian either.

I wasn't really sheltered as a child. I was really open to new and different things. I was always really curious and had a taste for what was different. I grew up attending an elementary school which was predominantly Jewish in an all-Jewish neighborhood. I was clearly different. There was a discourse around me being perceived as "Black" within that school. I remember holidays would come up and people would start celebrating Christmas and Chanukah and then they would talk about Kwanza and be like, "Hey, Boonaa, why don't you tell us about Kwanza?" I didn't even know what Kwanza was. There was this idea and perception about who I was. They were already defining for me who I was. Little did they know I didn't even know who I was.

My parents immigrated to Canada in the '80s. I was their first child born in Canada. My parents speak English very well, but there were still gaps between what we understood from each other, especially culturally. I don't speak our native tongue that well, so there was this huge disconnect between their experience and my experience, their expectations and my understanding of who I was and what I was supposed to do. Growing up, I was like a season Muslim. Every time Ramadan would come around, I would try my best. I remember there was one other brother I went to school with and we played soccer together. We would fast during the soccer season and it was tough, but we did it and I felt proud. I felt a spark of pride in being Muslim. It didn't come that often. I never really told people I was Muslim, but those Ramadan times, I felt proud. It was an opportunity to get together with family. We would have *iftar* at home and I wasn't even praying, but I was down for the fast. I would never really abandon Ramadan fully. There were certain things I

would never completely abandon. I have fond childhood memories of my father taking me to Tariq *masjid* for *jummah* and now I live by Tariq *masjid* and I go there by myself. It's strange to remember, but I would literally just go there and sleep. I could never stay awake during any *khutba*. I used to think, "This is the most boring thing ever," but it was only half an hour. It felt like I was there for 2 or 3 hours. I just remember my parents getting me into the habit, saying, "*Jummah* is something you have to do no matter what. You have to come back to Allah."

I think people oftentimes polarize Islam or how to be a Muslim in this country. People worship their cars, money, women, whatever. This makes me feel as if we live in a land of extremes. On one hand, you have people doing things that, from an Islamic framework, we wouldn't understand or agree with. Then, there are ideas of capitalism, which are a driving force behind people's spiritual deterioration. People are morally bankrupt in this country. Even if you are a person who acknowledges a faith, I feel like most times you don't even stick to it. You don't understand it. There's so much emphasis on us to just buy stuff that you forget where you're going to go when all that stuff is gone.

As Muslims in this country, sometimes we feel like we're being persecuted. Sometimes we feel like this country has a certain attitude towards us and people don't like us. As a result, Muslim people get overwhelmed. It's not like in Muslim countries or the Old World where people from different faiths historically have lived together. In this country, there's no balance. It's either they're going to war with us or we're going to war with them. *Subhan Allah*, we can't just live. People become polarized because of that mentality. I think, for example, brothers and sisters who have reverted to Islam are more vulnerable to getting caught up in polarized views. They tend to run to either extreme and fail to see a middle ground. Even people who come from Muslim families, when you begin to practice your *deen*, it's very hard to find a middle ground. A lot of people feel as though they have to overcompensate for all the destruction they see around them. People are scared to be associated with the world they see outside: the materialism, the sexuality, the promiscuity. They either run into exile to be hidden from it or they become a part of it, like in *The Matrix*. Very few of us succeed at moderation in our lives. I think there is a big opportunity for us to be an example of what Islam really is in this country. A lot of people are not willing to step up to that.

The Muslim community is not as active as it should be. There are a lot of issues that we need to work out ourselves. We need to figure out what we're doing in this country and why we're here. There are going to be disagreements. That's fine, let's move forward. I think a lot of people are

getting comfortable with the idea of doing what's traditionally acceptable. There's a big emphasis on continuing our cultural traditions and minimizing the fact that Islam, when put out on its own, is distinctly different from our cultures. A lot of us try to keep our cultures alive. We want to have cultural events, do cultural things. But culture is now being hybrid-ed. We are not in a place anymore to preserve culture. Allah is the Eternal. Allah is not going anywhere. This *deen* is here forever. Your culture changed the moment you moved streets, but this *deen* is supposed to be the same everywhere it's practiced. We can't seem to comprehend the idea that there is need for us to be unified. The Prophet's (SAW) message was for all mankind. For some reason, we think of helping our own communities instead of all Muslims.

If you think change can't happen, you're naive. Change is the only thing constant. As Muslims, we should have the most incentive to want to change, to fix this place. I really feel like our society is sickened. The heart is black. We have a responsibility to help cure it. We need to take a localized, hands-on approach to change.

Keith Cooke – Saskatoon

My name is Keith Garrison Cooke. I'm from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. That's where I grew up for most of my life. I spent a small amount of time in Fernie, British Columbia, just kind of snowboarding and relaxing. It was very nice. Now I live in Edmonton, Alberta.

People segregate themselves, I find. Especially seeing different immigrants come. In Edmonton, there are a lot of Arabs on the north side, you've got a bunch of East Indians in the south, and then there are Africans that live downtown. They kind of separate themselves and break off from each other. They argue over some silly things and I don't understand why they kind of break their communities up. We should be trying to all get together and get that sense of community as a whole. I do, on the other hand, understand why they would do that. When you move to a new place, it's kind of scary and you want to group up with like people. It just kind of happens that way. I don't think anybody's really consciously trying to do that. I think it just kind of happens because it's easier for them, but every year there's an argument about when the *Eid* prayers are and where they're going to happen and it splits the city. I don't know exactly what the best way is to organize something where we all get together, but I think it's up to the leaders among the communities for those different areas to say, "Hey, we need to make a conscious effort. We need to all

be together for this." That's a time when you should put all those differences aside.

I think the common attitude towards religion here, from what I've seen, is, "You can believe what you want to believe, just don't throw it at me." A lot of people are fine with me being Muslim or other people being Christian. They just don't want to be preached to about it. Some people get in your face about it and act like they're more righteous and belittle other people, thinking they're silly for not believing. It goes both ways. There are atheists that are like, "Oh, you're stupid for believing in God. That's ridiculous. Why would you believe in this fake thing you can't see?" I say the same thing to them: "You're more than welcome to be an atheist. That's not my choice, though." So far, that attitude has worked out quite well for me.

I don't try to sell my religion to anybody, but I definitely try to educate people that are ignorant about it. I think that's a huge responsibility as a Muslim. I'm not the most educated person because I'm a convert and there's still a ridiculous amount of stuff for me to learn, but if I see somebody with a misconception, I'll try to explain it. A lot of people are quick to call things like that racism. Instead of being offended, you need to take that as an opportunity to educate. When we see situations like that, we need to do our best to try and give people information on where they can find things out if we don't know the answers ourselves.

You see in the news all these people that are afraid of radical Muslims but I think it's Muslims themselves that are the most afraid of something like that because it's such a misrepresentation of the religion that they love so dearly. There could be 3 million good Muslims and if one bad one does something, then obviously that's the one that's going to hit the news and everybody's going to blow it out of proportion. If we notice youth becoming alienated and have a fear they may become radicalized, we should combat that by helping them socialize with each other. There are certain Muslim parents out there that raise their kids telling them, "Don't do this because Islam says no," but they don't necessarily teach the reasons for some of those. I think when you teach it with justifications, kids can grasp it more.

There are a lot of Muslims that have talent that goes unshowcased because there's such a strong focus in their communities to spit out doctors and engineers. We have a lot more to offer. Artistic expression is good because it encourages the youth to get involved but makes it fun. People get this feeling like religion's all stuffy and strict, but to make it into

something that's fun or something that the kids want to do and allowing them to be creative is nice.

Radwan Mohammad – Edmonton

My name is Omar Radwan Omar Hassan Mohammad. I could actually keep going back, like, eight generations and my mom can go back, like, till Adam and Eve. I'm Somali, born in 1985 in Djibouti, which is a neighbouring country. It's like Somalia, but French Somalia. We moved out here in '89 because of the war. We got lucky because we had American visas, which a lot of people didn't have. So we went from Djibouti to France—and we could have immigrated to France, I could have been French. We could have immigrated to Belgium because my dad has family there, but we didn't, so I could have been Dutch. Then we went to Washington D.C. and we could have stayed there, but we didn't. We went to New York and we didn't stay there either. Luckily, we ended up in Montreal.

I would identify myself as a Muslim who's Canadian because being Muslim is first and everything else comes second. I'm a Muslim who lives in Canada. I'm proud to be Canadian. I wouldn't want to be anything else—if I couldn't be Somali, of course. Canada gives you all these opportunities and lets you be who you want to be so there's no archetypal “Canadian Muslim” or “Muslim Canadian”. If you choose to identify yourself as a Muslim, there are certain restrictions and being Canadian allows you to identify yourself as a Muslim. Other countries might have limited freedom of religion. In Canada, I can live out my religion completely and fully.

Some people here believe they're being discriminated against because they're Black, other people understand things differently. Older people understand what's happening, but the younger guys do have that animosity through the TV, music and all of that, to police, etc., so when discrimination happens, they take it as an offence or as a personal insult to their culture or who they are. It's not only happening in Toronto, it's happening in Minnesota where there's a large Somali community. These guys would follow this narrative of “it's us against them” that's being used around the world and it's effective because in the Somali community, there are a lot more people with single mothers, a lot of people who didn't know their parents because they died in the war and there are a lot of people who remember all of that. We have to remember that the war that happened over there, it had a lot more to do with tribes and who had power, less to do with religion. Now that it's viewed in a religious

context, it's like, "Let's kick out these Americans," or "these American puppets, the Ethiopians" and so on. These guys that have been going to Saturday Islamic class and Sunday Qur'an class, all of these classes, they have the *deen* but they're being fed this narrative that America's evil, these guys are evil, and it's easy to tell them, "Okay, here's a ticket. Let's go do something about it." That's happening.

The narrative is so ingrained in not just the Somali community but in the larger Muslim community, these conspiracy theories and so on. It's hard to speak the same language, even when it's English and English. If you say, "These are the facts," people don't accept those facts. It's hard to have a conversation with somebody when you don't have the same view of the world as them. It's extremely hard to dissuade them from what they're thinking because the only thing they're hearing is something that reinforces them. Like FOX news watchers, for example. The only thing they're hearing is Sarah Palin again and again, so they're going to think Sarah Palin is right.

You would need some other avenue less charged before finding a common ground. Sports, art, anything else like that where it's not so serious. When you gain that rapport, then you can move on to discuss anything else. If you start with something serious, they will cut down your credentials. "You're not Muslim enough, you're not a *shaykh*, you're not this, you're not that, you're not from, you know, university." So if you start with that, you won't get anywhere.

Sana Siddiqui – Burnaby

My name is Sana Siddiqui. I'm 22. I'm studying Criminology at SFU. I'm just about to graduate and head to Toronto for my Masters' in Social Work. I grew up in Vancouver. I'm biracial. I think that's important to know in terms of my perspective.

I have experience with Islamophobia personally. But there are multiple levels where Islamophobia has manifested. There's the cultural racism against Muslims, there's systemic discrimination, there's racial profiling. The Muslim community is from such diverse cultural communities that oftentimes it gets confused. For example, there was a poll that looked at which communities Canadians think are discriminated against the most and Pakistani was put into a separate category from Muslims. It's weird because in Canada a huge chunk of the Muslims are Pakistani. So how do you compare those statistics to other studies then if you're lumping these communities in different areas? When you look at someone from a visible

minority background, they might be part of many different minority groups as well as being Muslim. I think the community is dealing with racism but also Islamophobia. What does Islamophobia mean? I think it would be to act in a prejudiced or discriminating fashion because of stereotypical beliefs about Muslims and Islam.

We had a “Muslims of Tomorrow” conference which came from collaboration between the youth council and the RCMP because the elders’ version was defunct and didn’t really do anything. We planned a conference and brought in four imams. They were from different areas. The idea was to have them talk about issues of Islamophobia. They talked about how it was un-Islamic to commit acts of violence and that they were terrorist acts. But at the same time, our community has a role in preventing these forms of thinking from progressing, identifying them and taking preventative measures; that’s our duty as Muslims. They took a community-specific approach to that. These imams weren’t told what to say by the RCMP, they were just picked in collaboration with the RCMP. There were some youth who felt the RCMP was unfairly targeting the Muslim community. They thought the RCMP was highlighting an issue that didn’t affect them in their daily lives and that they were trying to infiltrate our community. Other youth felt that radicalization was a problem. But the youth who came to this conference were the mainstream, integrated, vocal youth. They weren’t the youth who were either vulnerable or not involved in organizations already, so they felt it wasn’t useful. Another part of the community thought it was a good way of doing public relations and it was important to involve the RCMP in order to create a better relationship. I would say that I’m probably of that opinion as well. I think it’s important that the RCMP has contact with our Muslim youth community.

Even though I feel more comfortable around women that wear *hijab*, I avoid isolating myself by engaging in community activities like volunteering with the Olympics here in Vancouver. I spent time around people I would have never otherwise interacted with. They were middle-aged Caucasian women and they were asking me what it was like to wear *hijab*. If we never had that interaction, they would have never had my perspective. And when this bill came out to ban *niqab* in Quebec, they would think those women were segregating themselves from society. I think when they were given my perspective, it started to build an understanding. It helps when you talk to people and get more involved in the community. You can get involved with poverty, anti-war, child abuse, whatever. Islam promotes healthy communities, so get involved in all these mainstream organizations instead of just creating a Muslim organization to deal with it.

It's healthy to have a spectrum of diversity in the Muslim community because it gives different perspectives, which is something that happened at the time of the Prophet (SAW). I remember around election time I got this email from someone in our community who said, "Don't vote because you're supporting gay marriages." You know what? We have a right to participate in our elections, to go talk to our MPs and to talk about our opinions. Just because you vote for this party that has this policy down the road doesn't mean that you're endorsing it. Plus, part of being Canadian is to respect that people express themselves in different ways. Why would that party court Muslims' favour if Muslims don't vote? Secondly, why would you just reject that right that you have if you could actively make a difference and then say, "Well, this country is against Muslims." I think that attitude is really detrimental to our community development.

Sara Khalid – Mississauga

My name is Sara Khalid. I did my undergrad at the University of Waterloo. I'm now doing my Masters' at the University of Waterloo in Architecture. I was born and raised in Mississauga. My family has always been in Mississauga since I was born. The schools I went to were pretty mixed in terms of ethnicity and background, so growing up, I was always around other cultures.

Islam wasn't really something I thought about until I went away to university. It was always at the back of my mind, but I was never really practicing. I never really rebelled because I was given space. I was living on my own and I still had the freedom to choose my career and to be my own person. I never had an urge to rebel against my parents' values. Living on my own gave me time to think about things on my own. I started thinking about Islam and I joined Muslim youth activities and just read up about it by myself. It made sense to me. I've always identified myself as a Muslim, but now I feel like I'm in a better position or a better place than I was before. The Muslim community doesn't attract me at all, though. What attracts me to the faith is its simplicity and the fact that it's logical. It has all the values I had before. I've always believed in a god. I just didn't actively pursue a relationship with this god until I chose the Islamic route to worship this god. It gave me a clearer perspective on life in terms of where my priorities are. I think more big-picture now instead of having tunnel vision with regard to daily problems. I find it's easier to step out and gain some balance before jumping into problematic situations. It's given me strength in that regard. It's given support and fed the soul.

For the longest time, I was afraid to go to a mosque because I don't associate with a sect. I thought if I went to a mosque I would be called out or questioned on my Islamic knowledge. They were just ideas I had and they were wrong. It was just what I felt at that time. Later on, I felt a personal need to go inside a mosque to pray and I didn't mind it at all. Sometimes I would come across certain groups that would pass on some "words of wisdom" that I never asked for, but I know they were doing it out of their concern for me and they thought what they were doing was good. In terms of the Muslim community, the issue that I have is it's so segmented and there's a lot of judgment passed between one community and another. It frustrates me to see that if two people identify themselves as Muslims, why can't we look past differences? This creates conflict and feelings of discrimination. There's a stigma attached to people of a certain group that does things a certain way. I just find that pretty sad.

Generally, I come across amazing Muslims and I've been involved in activities with amazing Muslims, so it's not the entire Muslim community at large, but I do find that there's those pockets in the Muslim community that have a "you're either with us or against us" kind of attitude. I can't say that being afraid to enter a mosque is more of a Canadian Muslim issue. I think it's just an issue that some Muslims in general might come across. I can't even say what their upbringing was like. Maybe they had a bad experience at a mosque and don't want to go again. Maybe they've had no experience going to a mosque and don't know what happens there. There could be several reasons why Muslim youth feel the same way I do. I can't really say it's a unique experience.

If you compare places like the suburbs and the city, I think the main issue in places like Mississauga is that people don't feel like the public space is theirs. They don't feel attached to it because it's very monochromatic. It's not defined by the residents living there and doesn't reflect their various cultures and stories. Of course, certain areas are starting to become more ethnically-oriented, but these are nooks in the city and they're not very integrated. Still, people's stories are starting to come out and when they do, it's like, "This is my space and I'm making a statement about it. I want to care about it because it's my space." I feel like what we can do in the suburbs is go outside and use our spaces. It might not be hanging out at a park, but it could be going on a bike ride. That's a way you could start feeling more connected to your urban environment. The problem is that suburbs were not designed to make people feel welcomed. When people are outside more, they experience more and feel more engaged.

Sara Suleman – Montreal

My name is Sara Suleman. I'm 21 years old. I'm at McGill University in Management. I was born in Montreal, in the suburbs. I lived on the south shore and grew up in a residential neighborhood. I went to a Muslim school. We learned normal things like Math, English and French but we had an Islamic curriculum as well. We learned the Qur'an and Arabic and other stuff. It was fun. I think it gives you a good base as a Muslim and it gives you a strong connection with your community.

Learning to interact in a mainly Christian community was like coming out of my comfort zone. It was the first time people would ask me questions about Islam or why am I a Muslim. At the time, I wasn't wearing the *hijab* and so people would ask me, "How practicing are you?" It was the first time I had to question myself. The youth I met in Egypt, I would say they were less extreme about religion. I think they took it much more easy, whereas the Muslims here sometimes will tend to be a lot more "by the book." Like, sometimes, in universities with Muslims it's awkward how many men and women interact. There's a sort of discomfort because we're in a society where there's so much freedom and when we're amongst Muslims, we become like, "Oh, I can't talk to someone from the opposite sex. What are people going to say?" I believe "extreme" is a relative word. People might think that I'm extreme, I don't know. But if it goes to a point where it goes to something that might be violent or something that will actually harm people in your environment, then I think imams or Muslim leaders should speak up about these things.

We should also respect that people will always have different mindsets and people will always have different levels of religiosity. Being "by the book" is not necessarily being extreme, it's a mindset. You can be "by the book" in every aspect of your life—in school or at work. It could just be a personality trait that is also present in your religious life. We have to respect people's differences but at the same time, if it goes to a point where people can't communicate properly to the community, leaders need to speak up. The more you have power, the more you can change. If you're someone no one has ever heard of and just happen to break windows as a manifestation of dissatisfaction, you'll be in the news for about a minute and that's it. But if you get involved in politics and you want to change things and you try to get involved in a political party, then, yeah, maybe you can change something. Being angry once in a while does not bring change in the long term, but having a constructive goal, a vision, that might bring change.

I think there's a felt presence of Muslims in the big cities of Canada. If you look at the history, the French in Canada have always been dominated and the English Canadians always had more power, especially here in Montreal. That's still ingrained in the memory of the people, these past experiences of being different, having to struggle to preserve your language and religion.

Now when they see a lot of new foreigners, part of the problem is our communities don't bother speaking French. French people would like immigrants to make an effort to learn their language, to realize that, yes, they're in Canada, but they're in Quebec specifically. They're not necessarily more racist, they're just maybe more hostile because of their history. I think we should say to them, "We're Canadians, just like you." I was born here. You can't tell us, "Go back to your country." This is our country. Muslims should, as much as possible, try to contribute positively and just try to break the stereotypes and dialogue more and build bridges. If you approach people in a human way and make them feel this is just as much my home as it is yours, then I think sooner or later they accept you.

Stephen Brown – Montreal

My name is Stephen Alexander Jesse Brown. Friends call me Steve. I'm 23 years old. I go to Concordia University. I'm an Afro-Canadian and my mom was a mix. She was born in England and she's half French, half Jamaican. She was French from France, not from here. My family was originally from slaves in the United States and they walked over 1000 kilometers to get to Canada. We've been here for 7 generations. My parents are Evangelical Christians. When I was 5 years old, my father sold the house, packed up the family and moved to Montreal to start a church.

I got to a certain age and started to wonder, "Is there a God?" and if there is a God, "Who is He and what does He want from me?" I went on a campaign to educate myself in an independent fashion about God and this question. I read the Bible. I read the Torah. I read a ridiculous amount of history. I read the roots of polytheism and monotheism. I read theories of how religions came to be. I wasn't finding a clearly defined answer. When I came to college here, I took a Knowledge class. Randomly at that time, I picked up a copy of the Qur'an given to me by the MSA that had the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) right at the beginning of it. I was so impressed with this person and what he did as a historical figure that I decided to read his book. I originally opened the book like I open

any other religious book. I thought, "Okay, let me start putting holes in it. Or maybe I'll get some ideas about how to tackle my Bible after that." I got half way through *Baqarah* and I thought there was something about this book. The more I read the Qur'an, the more I was pushed to learn. I got to a point where the book kind of scared me because I was like, "This book is truth and I'm going to get to a point where either I have to accept this truth and, if I'm a truthful person, submit to it or I'm not." From then on, it was one thing after another and on September 2, 2008, at *maghrib* in the Musalah Concordia, I took *shahada*.

In terms of meeting people who are radical, I've never met anybody like that. I think there's no such thing as Islamic radicalism. You have criminals who are Muslims. You have people who are very prejudiced who are Muslims. You have people who are violent that are Muslims and they do stupid things just like anybody else. I think what people get confused with is the language that Muslims use. In certain cases in our society, violence is not only allowed, it is mandated. For example, if I live in Quebec and Korea decides to attack British Columbia, they're going to call in a draft, which has to be done by a specific politician in a specific setting. Every male or female of fighting age and capability is going to be trained and will have to fight to defend their country.

We think in a nationalistic sense. We're going to talk about democracy, rule of law and rights. If you keep that in mind, it's easy to understand how Muslims think. There is no nationalism in Islam. The concept of international borders, from a religious point of view, shouldn't even exist. Most Muslims at a certain level of piety all think like that. If somebody attacks a Palestinian, somebody in Indonesia is going to be angry about it. Muslims lack the political, cultural and financial ability to have that cohesive unit and call a draft, though. A draft in Islamic literature for a purpose of defense in war is called *jihad*.

This idea of random crazy people blowing up cars and civilians is not a *jihad*. I don't think destroying anything is beneficial, period. I think what really hurts politicians and what really hurts people is their wallets. People are slaves to their wallets. If you really want to make a change, stop shopping, go out and vote. Learn about your rights and put politicians to the test. Waving signs might look great on the news but it doesn't really do anything. People have to get back to owning their media and owning their neighborhoods. Ownership is nine tenths of the law. If we're just going to let other people own everything and make all the decisions for us, what is the point of having rights? Your rights are only as good as your ability to uphold them and hold people to their commitment.

Muslims have a huge problem. They have lost the essence of Islam and what it means. Islam is not just rules. When I converted to Islam, I was like, "Can you teach me about Islam?" Rules, rules, rules, rules, rules, rules. I don't want to hear anymore rules. Islam is about feeling peace. You can't accomplish that through rules. The end purpose of Islam is not to obey the rules. The rules are there to accomplish the end, which is to be good human beings.

Yezin Al-Qaysi – Halifax

My name is Yezin Al-Qaysi. I'm from Halifax and I'm studying Political Science at McGill University. I spent the larger chunk of my childhood in Halifax. We moved around a lot before settling in Halifax. I came to Halifax with a good idea of how the rest of the country was like and how it looked. Halifax was a very quiet, polite place. We lived in a nice part of the city. We called it the south end. We used to live in a student housing co-op, so we got to meet a lot of people from different countries. I made a lot of Iranian, African and Asian friends. I got to learn about a lot of other cultures and it was fantastic.

When you start observing your religious values you realize that you can't do everything else that your friends do. Then you realize that you're behaving different and you start looking out for different things. When I was in grade 9 and 10, I wasn't allowed to go to school dances. "Why can't I go to a school dance?" I would ask. "Because they are foreign to our culture. They're not right and they don't encourage the right things," they would say. I think me and my sister ended up going once because we really wanted to go to a dance, but we didn't like it because it wasn't what we were used to. We never went again. When you're told something is not good, usually you try to figure out why. If it's consistent with your values, then you kind of accept it. My parents were very adamant about us choosing our friends wisely because they wanted us to spend time with people who had values and who weren't risky. We chose our friends carefully. They weren't Muslim friends. We didn't have a lot of Muslims in school, but they were people that we got along with fine and that our parents were comfortable with.

We can't underestimate the value of environment on shaping peoples' minds. That applies to radicalization. With Muslims, when they came from isolated communities that don't interact and contribute, I think you're going to get the propagation of very radical ideologies. When people in an isolated society don't interact with others, it contributes greatly to their world view and to their frame of mind. I think one thing about Canadians

that defines us is these cities and universities full of all different sorts of people. It forces us to challenge our assumptions and to re-evaluate what we think. I don't see radicalization as pertaining to the Muslim community in general but as a risk to every community. I'm sure you have radicalization in the Greek Orthodox community or Lebanese Christian organizations or even Shi'a Muslims, and in the Jewish community, especially. When you isolate people, you preserve social values, but you have to put yourself in the context of your location. It's a balance where you want to preserve and maintain your identity, but you also want to contribute and integrate—I hate that word—I mean, cooperate and become part of the society you're in. When you go on either side you risk complete assimilation, which I don't think is a good thing because it takes away from what makes Canada really great, and you go to radicalization, which also serves to polarize different factions of society and is equally dangerous.

The reason I hate the word "integration" is because, for me, integration is synonymous with assimilation. Assimilation assumes a superior culture. It assumes there's one way of life and that's the way to do things. I see a lot of value in this type of society, but I don't think it justifies undermining the different qualities of other cultures in our society. Once, we went to British Columbia on a summer camp and we got to connect to this very deep aspect of Aboriginal culture and their value system. If we managed to use parts of it as building blocks for this society, I think we'd be developing a new level of civilization where we would merge the positive aspects of societies. We could learn from other cultures. I don't believe in assimilation because it makes other cultures weaker and they're less capable of adapting to challenges in the future.

What's great about Canada is that the change you get out of it is the effort you put in. If you really feel strongly about something, you can't sit down and expect it to change. It's extremely important to get involved, to get out of your comfort zone. We have to really build bridges with all sorts of different people, communities and belief systems.

