

Inner City Network

By *Beate Matthies, Chair, Auckland District Council of Social Services*

Diversity in Auckland

On 24 May, 2018 ADCOSS organised an *Inner City Network* meeting with a difference. In recognising that religion is important to some of our members and that religious organisations contribute a great deal to the social services in Auckland, the theme for the May meeting of the *Inner City Network (ICN)* was “Multiculturalism and Inter-Faith Communities”.

We were invited by the *Religious Diversity Centre* to hold our meeting in the *University of Otago House* in Queen Street. People remarked on the diversity of the participants and the very congenial atmosphere. We noticed that several of the attendees were long-time ADCOSS members, but had never been to an ICN meeting before.

William Davis (Ngati Whatua Orakei) opened the meeting with a karakia that encourages sharing and collaboration. Then *Jocelyn Armstrong, Chair of the Religious Diversity Centre Trust* gave a brief overview of New Zealand history, starting from the first Mission Stations in the mid-19th century and covering 150 years of British culture, up to Auckland being now one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world. A key turning point was the new *Immigration Act*



of 1987 which broadened the range of countries from which migrants were accepted. As the cultural diversity increased, so did the religious diversity.

When *Helen Clark* launched the *Religious Diversity Centre* in March 2016, she reiterated that,

“The world badly needs voices of reason and tolerance and those who will work to build dialogue and respect across faiths and beliefs. I do believe New Zealand can show the way.”

Very encouraging words for the new *Centre* that fosters appreciation, understanding, and deeper relationships among the religious, spiritual, and secular communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Ram Lingam, the Hindu representative on the *Auckland Interfaith Council* (AIFC) agreed with *Jocelyn Armstrong*. Even though the number of people who are not affiliated to any religion or faith is very high in New Zealand, those belonging to a religion or faith are still the majority. *Ram* spoke of his experience from his home country India, a country with more than 100 different cultures and many different religions. Multiculturalism cannot be separated from Interfaith. The *AIFC* was established in 2003 and the Board is made up of 11 volunteers from different religions / faiths and different backgrounds. The *AIFC* initiates events that bring people together and build bridges across differences.

Thuten Kesang QSM from the *Auckland Multicultural Society Inc* was the third guest speaker. The *Society* was established in 1978 and has just celebrated 40 years. At that time, there was no “multi-cultural” New Zealand. The active volunteer members of the *Auckland Multicultural Society* are from 40 different ethnicities. They certainly were sowing the seed for the work between cultures and ethnicities that is ongoing.

After the presentations there was much sharing of experiences and connecting between the attendees. This networking in the Inner City was a wonderful experience. We would like to thank the *Religious Diversity Centre* for their support and providing us with a very special venue. Gratitude was also expressed for the arranging of disability parking.