

Mandaean Community Consultation Report



STARTTS
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A special thanks to the working party which has consisted of the following people

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
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| Sabri Fezai | The Sabian Mandaean Association in Australia |
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| Gary Cachia | STARTTS |
| Esber Melhem | STARTTS |
| Denise Kerry | STARTTS |
| Lina Ishu | STARTTS |

The report has been revised and edited a number of times by the above members from the community and has already begun to be implemented by STARTTS in it's delivery of services to the community.

Although the consultation occurred in 2006 the report has been updated to include changes in government policy and the community.

Without the ongoing effort of all these people the consultations and implementation would not be possible.



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Foreword

STARTTS is pleased to present the first STARTTS' Mandaean community consultation report.

The consultation was part of STARTTS annual community consultation program. STARTTS believes that community consultations are an essential tool to improve STARTTS' services and our relationships with refugee communities.

The Mandaean community are an ancient group of people who have survived immense persecution in their home countries of Iraq and Iran. They have been forced to flee the devastation in Iraq not only for personal survival but for survival of their people. This exodus of Madaeans from gulf nations has been ongoing for more than a decade and has resulted in very few Madaeans still living in Iraq and Iran.

The Madaeans in NSW have established a long standing relationship with STARTTS and have participated in all aspects of STARTTS' activities. The community consultation aimed to increase cooperation between Madaeans and STARTTS and improve Mandaean clients access to STARTTS' services.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the Mandaean groups for supporting this process particularly the Mandaean Cultural Centre, the International Mandaean Nasoraean Supreme Council, The Sabaian Mandaean Association in Australia and the Mandaean Women's Group.

I would also like to give a big thankyou to STARTTS staff (past and present) who were actively involved in this project – Esber Melhem, Gary Cachia, Denise Kerry and Lina Ishu.

Jorge Aroche
STARTTS Executive Director

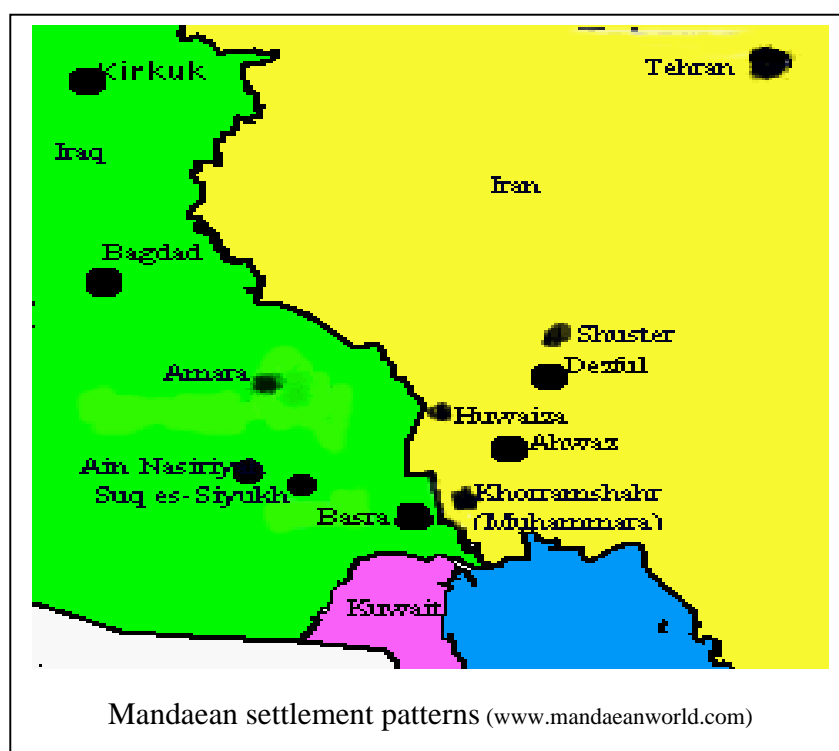


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Background to the Mandaean Community

“It is not easy to speak about the origin and the history of the Mandaeans, because it is hardly discussed at all in their literature. They themselves believed that, as their religion was primordial and founded by the world of light, they were not concerned with the history of this world” (Franzmann, 1989:172).

For the last 2000 years, the Mandaean community has resided along the banks of the lower Euphrates and Tigris Rivers in Southern Iraq and in Khuzestan along the Karun River in Iran (Seymour, 2006). Today, they are also found in large cities such as Baghdad and Ahwaz (ibid). Due to their traditional employment as gold and silversmiths, jewellers or other highly skilled professionals, During the sixties and through to the eighties of the 20th century many Mandaean in Iraq belonged to the wealthier middle class (as quoted by UNHCR, 2005). Throughout the last several years, they have established a small diaspora population of 20,000 in Europe, North America and Australia (Reinke, 2006). World wide estimates of their population currently stand between 50,000 to 70,000 and are spread out across 12 different countries (www.en.wikipedia.msn.com; www.mandaeanunion.org).



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Mandaeanism is the oldest surviving Gnostic religion which can be traced back to the 3rd century AD (Reinke, 2006). It is a monotheistic religion whereby Adam was the first Mandaean to receive religious instruction from God (www.mandaeanunion.org). Mandeans are not Jewish because they do not follow Torah's teachings, nor are they Christian since they do not perceive Jesus as god (ibid). They consider Adam, Noah and John the Baptist (Yehyea Yahana) as prophets. Mandeans believe in repeated *Masbuta* (Baptism) as the key ritual to their faith, which acts as a cleansing agent against sins committed and which saves their souls from all earthly bad effects (ibid). They are an extremely unique and private group of people who believe in peace above all else and are prevented by their beliefs from using violence or force (www.en.wikipedia.org). They believe in marriage, reproduction and in the importance of leading an ethical and moral life (ibid).

Mandaeanism is considered by the Mandaean community as a religion and ethnicity at the same time

Persecution of the minority: Mandeans.

The Coalition for the Defence of Human Rights website, an international civil rights movement for the victims of jihad and islamization, indicates that there is “*overwhelming evidence that Mandeans have a long history of discrimination and suffering at the hands of Islamists in their countries of origin in the Middle East, namely Iran and Iraq*” (UNHCR, 2004). The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), a Christian advocacy group across 121 nations, argues that the Mandeans have survived 1400 years of persecution and that in Islamic countries they're regarded as 'infidels' (*Kaffir*) and considered 'unclean' (*najes*) (UNHCR, 2004). The UNHCR guidance note (2001) states that although Iraq was considered a secular state, laws were predominantly Islamic or inspired by the Qu'ran. In the Qu'ran, Mandeans are referred to as 'Sabeans' and are provided with protection under Islam, however, since the Islamic revolution in 1979, certain groups have interpreted this differently and thus, have been denied protected status alongside Islam (UNHCR, 2001). For example, a prominent Shiite cleric in Iraq, Ayatollah al-Hakim, stated that Mandeans were not 'people of the book', and thus couldn't be protected against forced conversion to Islam (Bolender, 2005).



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Under the regime of Saddam Hussein, who was president of Iraq between 1979 and 2003, Mandaeans were either disregarded or used by intimidation to serve the regimes purpose and those who refused faced brutal punishment (UNHCR, 2001). In essence, they were “*informants against their own people and tools for the government’s propaganda*” (ibid). Furthermore, the level of protection they received depended on the level of loyalty they offered which ultimately came down to sacrificing their religious beliefs (ibid). In addition, Mandaeans and their families were often targeted by a secret police (*Mukhabarat*), and threatened with physical harm, if they did not provide generous financial contributions (UNHCR, 2005). Between 1991 and 1993, Mandaeans living in the marshlands of southern Iraq were caught in amongst an extermination campaign led by Saddam Hussein against insurgents and deserters (Reinke, 2006). As a result, the population of the Mandaean community in this region fell from 5000-7000 to 1000-2000 (ibid).

Besides a tyrannical dictatorship, another factor that has affected the population of Iraq has been the imposition of economic sanctions which has led to large scale financial and moral decay (UNHCR, 2001). Both the Gulf-Persian (1991) and Iran-Iraq (1980-1988) wars, together with the economic sanctions, has led to falling health standards, poor sanitation and many endemic diseases within the country (www.encarta.msn.com). By 2005, the average life expectancy at birth was 41 years and the infant mortality rate rose to 49 deaths per 1000 live births in 2006 (ibid). Furthermore, there was only 1 physician available for every 1,842 people and 1 hospital bed for every 769 inhabitants (ibid). This gradual destruction was interpreted by some Iraqis as a punishment from God due to the presence of atheists. Since the mid 1990s, Mandaeans were pressured against their will to convert to Islam even though this practice is not condoned in the Qur’an (UNHCR, 2001).



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Current Persecution.

In 2006, Foreign Policy magazine named Iraq as the fourth most unstable nation in the world (www.encyclopedia.com). Since the fall of the regime, reports were made of an expansion in religious extremism and its associated stricter Islamic values (UNHCR, 2005), a rise in corruption and crime and a deterioration in law and order (UNHCR, 2001). Consequently, this has made the situation for Mandaeans more perilous than that under the Ba'ath regime and Saddam Hussein which was officially overthrown by a US-led invasion in 2003 (www.encyclopedia.com). For instance, the UK Home Office provides details of how Islamic extremist groups are able to carry out acts of violence towards various minority groups with impunity and given religious justification for these attacks through the production of several religious edicts (*fatwas*) that describe the Mandaeans as impure and disapproving their beliefs (ECOI, 2006). The new Iraqi Constitution claims to provide rights to all citizens regardless of their religion or ethnicity, however, Article 2.1 has found to be a threat to religious freedom: "*Islam is the official religion of the state and a basic source of legislation. No law can be passed that contradicts the undisputed rules of Islam*" (Seymour, 2006). Accompanying legislative insecurity and as noted earlier, unofficial protection under the Qu'ran, is an inadequate police force and army who cannot prevent insurgents performing religious and moral purification against religious and ethnic minorities including the Mandaeans because of their aversion to Abraham and some say because of the envy of their wealth as well (ibid).

Thus, Mandaeans regularly experience discrimination and various forms of persecution such as physical assaults, kidnappings, robbery, forced conversion to Islam, confiscation of property and threats (ECOI, 2006). Under these conditions, raping a Mandaean woman can go unpunished in Iraq because of the belief that this act purifies an unbeliever and leaves the victims with no way of obtaining justice (Reinke, 2006). Similarly, Islamic judges in Iran have recently stated that the rape of Mandaean women and girls can be regarded as an act of purification and therefore, violators receive impunity (UNHCR, 2004). Dr Erica Hunter from the University of London stipulates that Mandaean children can be taken from their families and forced to reside and practice with Muslim families, and Mandaean couples can be forced to divorce and remarry Muslim partners (Reinke, 2006). Accompanying deliberate attempts to eradicate the



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Mandaean population, they are also increasingly discriminated against and harassed through arbitrary dismissal, expropriation, arrest, exclusion from government jobs and other forms of discriminatory treatment (ibid). By January 2006, 1000 families reportedly fled Iraq to Syria or Jordan reducing the initial Iraqi Mandaean population of 30,000 to 13,000 (Reinke, 2006).

Currently, there are between 5,000 and 10,000 Iranian Madaeans residing in Khuzestan (UNHCR, 2004) where there has been intensified repression since the new President took office in August 2005 (AI, 2006). Information in, "*The Report Iran: New Government Fails to Address Dire Human Rights Situation*", details how ethnic and religious minorities are being repressed, killed or detained. In addition, the report also highlights how Iranian legislation places significant restrictions on civil liberties such as freedom of expression through the re-introduction of the Press Courts which can inflict punishment for conveying an opinion, as well as the maintenance of the death penalty, and the frequent use of torture (ibid). The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states that Zoroastrian, Jewish and Christian Iranians are the only recognized religious minorities who are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies (UNHCR, 1995). As a result of their status as 'infidels', Madaeans in Iran are prohibited from handling food since it is argued they will cause the food to become 'unclean', Mandaean children are forced to study Islamic religion and Mandaean women are not fully protected against sexual assault (UNHCR, 2004).

The persecution and exodus of Madaeans continues today(2008). Rabbi Dr Brikha Nasoraia from the International Madaeeans Nasoraean supreme Council states that "the current persecution in Iraq is the most severe in the history of the Mandaean people. The Madaeans in Iraq are unable to come together to meet or practice their religion, they are consistently being targeted by extremists. He also states that spiritual leaders are unable to reach places of worship and most Mandaean leaders have already been forced to flee Iraq." He estimates that the exodus has resulted in an extreme reduction in the population of Madaeans in Iraq to now being less than 4000.



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Barriers to gaining safety from persecution.

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) (Currently Department of Immigration and Citizenship) maintains that “*the Australian Government is strongly committed to helping refugees and people who face serious abuses of their human rights*” (DIMA, 2006b) (Currently DIAC). However, Australia, along with other western Governments throughout Europe and the US, have been critically criticised as enforcing restrictions on Mandaeans and others who attempt to seek safety through the status of asylum and refugee (www.HumanRightsWatch.org). For instance, it has been argued that the humanitarian rights of refugees have been compromised in Australia through the implementation of migration zones and the Pacific Solution (Glendenning et al, 2003), as well as through visa restrictions, detention of asylum seekers and policies determining areas within or surrounding Iraq as ‘safe’ (www.HumanRightsWatch.org).

Despite the current changes to the Australian refugee policies, such as the abolition of the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) and the improvement of detention centres conditions, previous Australian policies of deterrence toward asylum seekers have been found to contribute to post-migration stress by adding to the effect of previous trauma in ongoing PTSD and other psychiatric symptoms (Silove, Steel & Watters, 2000). Australia’s policy has two main restrictive aspects that aim to deter refugees seeking asylum. Firstly, mandatory detention was introduced for persons arriving by boat or without valid visas in Australia in an attempt to control unauthorized streams of migration (Steel et al, 2006). A study by Momartin et al (2006) concluded that 95% of respondents to a questionnaire rated experiences in Australian immigration detention centres such as fears of being sent home, being told by officers they should return to their country of origin, and language difficulties during detention stay, responsible for causing serious or very serious stress. In addition, 90% of detainees stipulated that separation of families, being interviewed by immigration officers, not receiving adequate medical care, exposure to acts of violence and brutality, seeing people make suicide attempts, and general poor conditions within detention centres produced serious or very serious stress (ibid). In 2003, there were eighteen Iranian Mandaean families in detention who were without protection and reportedly being harassed by Muslim detainees and who may also be forced to adopt Australia’s repatriation project (ABC, 2003). The UNHCR has



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three times held that Australia's policy of mandatory detention of asylum seekers is a breach of international human rights laws (Glendenning et al, 2003).

The second shift in Australian policy regarding the status of refugees was introduced in 1999 which implemented time limits on residency by establishing a policy of temporary protection (Steel et al, 2006). Mandaean asylum seekers who were determined to be refugees who arrived before 1999 were issued permanent protection visas (PPVs), inherently providing them with an opportunity to rebuild their lives. Australian temporary protection visa holders have limited access to health care, education and work (Steel et al, 2006). Moreover, they have no access to family reunion migration and cannot travel overseas (ibid). A study comparing the mental health of TPV and PPV holders found that the former experienced a higher proportion of post-migration living difficulties due to such factors as being unable to return home in an emergency and anxiety about repatriation (Momartin et al, 2006). Overall, TPV status was found to be the main predictor for experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (ibid). (The TPV regime was ended in 2008.)

Thus, these two shifts in Australian policy have been argued to contribute to ongoing PTSD, depression and associated disability among refugees and asylum seekers (Steel et al, 2006). Immigration detention centres, Temporary Protection Visas and associated post-migration living experiences have all been identified as significant predictors for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Australian refugees (Momartin et al, 2006).

Fortunately, recent changes to the policies prevent future arrivals experiencing similar process, the majority of Mandaean went through this process. This process has implication for people settlement and recovery and Mandaean may require further assistant to recover from the effects of TPV and the detention experiences.



Mandaean Conceptions of the Therapeutic Qualities of Water

Tribe (1999) ascertains that there is growing recognition among mental health theorists and models of therapy that 'Western models of emotional distress' may not be compatible cross culturally and that responding to the needs of some refugees holds varied challenges for appropriate treatment (:235). Furthermore, clinical experience has taught Woodcock (1994) that refugee families may be more fixated on the changes to their lives than they are on symptoms of mental illness. However, given that untreated psychological illness has potential consequences, the therapist does have a role in assisting refugees back to health but warns that there must be 'transcultural' awareness regarding a groups response to trauma and exile, particularly 'religious and cultural ceremonies of healing' (ibid). Specifically, Eastmond (in Woodcock, 1994) contends that in order to properly treat 'cultural trauma', "*the transformative and healing potential of rituals and other collective, formalized and dramatic/symbolic enactments should be understood*". Ritual baptism contains a rich source of meaning and symbolism for the Australian Mandaean community and works as a shield against community and individual distress. It is a therapeutic method of purification, healing and self transformation in that it washes away impurity and removes transgressions and sins from the Soul (Crangle, 2005; The Nazarenes of Mount Carmel).

In the Mandaean religion, together with the King of Light, the Mandaeans worship the Great Life (Haii Rabi), which takes the form of 'living water' or *yardna*, and translates into water flowing in a natural stream (Time, 1969). The King of Light is a personification of light which is one of the two central 'vilifying power' sources (The Nazarenes of Mount Carmel). The eight spirits of light bestow health, strength, virtue and justice (ibid). The second vilifying power source is the Great Life, or the supreme deity, which is a personification of the 'creative and sustaining force of the universe' (ibid).

After creation, the Mandaeans asserted that black water encircled the earth and into these waters poured a small stream of living water from the heavenly Jordan (Franzmann, 1989). This made the earthly water 'tasty', and allowed children of men to drink from it to become like the great life (ibid). The presence of the heavenly Jordan in



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the earthly Jordan acts as a connection between the world of light and the earthly world, providing a readily available source of life in the world (ibid).

Water is widely used throughout Mandaean rituals including immersions (masbuta, masiqta, ordinations, weddings, and ritual slaughter), lustration (cleansing of the mandi, foot washing, washing of the knife before and after ritual slaughter) and drinking (Franzmann, 1989). On the whole, baptism is one of five central features of the Mandaean religion including: belief and love of god (Haimanotha); praying (Brakha); Fasting (Soma); Alms-giving (Zidga) and Baptism (Mashbuta) (LMRC, 2004).

Daily baptisms are a tangible expression of what occurs in their mental and spiritual lives (Thackara, 1994). Ritual immersions are called 'masbuta', derived from 'sba', meaning 'to plunge into a dye bath'. Thus, an individual enters the river metaphorically black or polluted and emerges white or purified (ibid). During the immersion, the candidate enters a transitional state from corruption and sin to life, where "*life of the world of light is mediated to the soul*" (Franzmann, 1989:165). Both light and life are described as ways or guides for the soul returning to the world of light (ibid). Alternatively, since the Great Life takes the form of living water, immersion in water is regarded not only as a symbol of Life, but to a certain extent, as Life itself (The Nazarenes of Mount Carmel). Specifically then, the purpose and significance of baptism is that by immersing in yardna, the Mandaean enters into close communion with the World of Light and receives physical well-being, protection against powers of death and eternal life to the Soul (ibid).

There are three types of baptisms: Rishma, Tamasha and Masbuta baptisms (The Nazarenes of Mount Carmel).

The Rishma baptism traditionally is performed daily before sunrise and after the evacuation of the bowels but before all religious ceremonies (ibid).

The second type, Tamasha Baptism, traditionally consists of three immersions into the river, must be performed by women after menstruation and after childbirth; by both men and women immediately after sex; after touching a dead body or after any defiling experience.



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The third ablution, Masbuta, traditionally is a full baptism and must be performed by a priest or a priestess (ibid). The Masbuta takes place on a Sunday, after a major defilement, such as an illness, or after any action which causes a person to feel shame, such as an argument (ibid).

The Mandaean adult baptism is regularly held each Sunday at the Nepean River located at Penrith and the Penrith City Council supports the community performing rituals in the Public Park (Nashmi, 2007). The Nepean River was chosen after careful research into the degree of pollution and presence and locations where bank and flow conditions would allow rituals to be safely conducted (Byrne et al, 2006). The River acts as a land resource for Mandaean baptism which effectively reconnects them to their homeland. More importantly, by creating a spiritual significance with the Nepean River, a connection is made between the community and host country, Australia, as well as “*allowing them to be understood as part of wider often global networks of meaning*” (Byrne et al, 2006:105).



Pictured above, is one of Sydney Australia's spiritual leaders of the international Mandaean Nasoraian community, Rabbi Brikha Nasoraia, wearing traditional white rasta and facing towards the Worlds of Light (<http://www.usyd.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=614>)



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Mandaean population in NSW

The Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) stipulates that the majority of Australian Mandaeans are born in Iraq with a minority originating from Iran (Nashmi, 2005). However, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA (Currently DIAC)) does not identify Mandaeanism as a religious category and together with their recent arrival in Australia, deems it difficult to ascertain their total number.

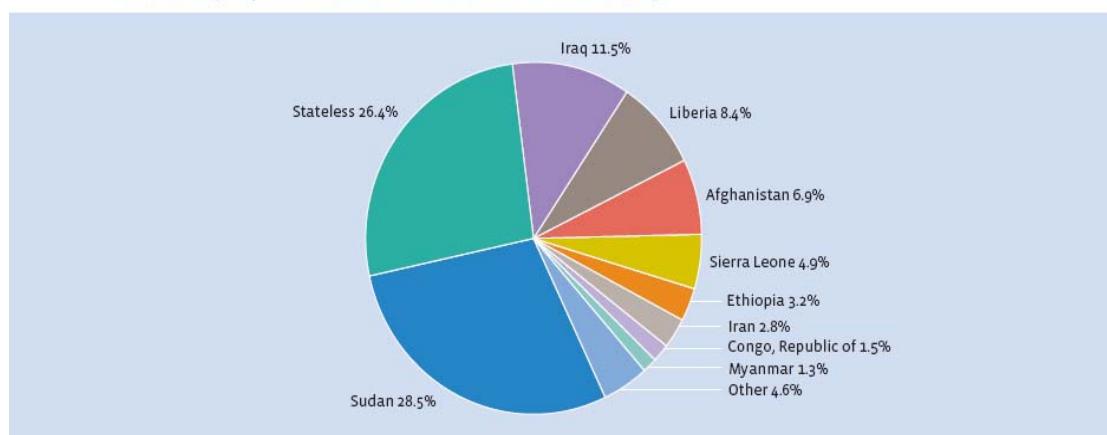
Australia is one of ten international countries offering a humanitarian resettlement and protection program (DIMA , 2005 (Currently DIAC)). In 2004-05, the humanitarian program contributed 11% to Australia's migrant intake (ABS, 2005). The program consists of an onshore component with permanent and temporary protection visas and an off-shore resettlement program comprising of refugees, the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) and the Secondary Movement Category (ibid). During 2005-06, the humanitarian program consisted of 6000 places for refugees and 7000 set aside for the SHP and the onshore category.

Recently, the UNHCR has recommended that Australia allow people from Africa and the Middle East and South Western Asian countries to take priority in our Humanitarian program (ABS, 2005). Since 2003-04, resettlements for Middle Eastern and South West Asian populations have increased by 2% (ibid). Overall, between 1996 and 2005, from the top 50 most common countries of birth, people born in Iraq had the third largest increase (10%) in Australia (ABS, 2005). The pie chart below illustrates that people born in Iraq and Iran comprised 11.5% and 2.8% respectively in Australia's 2004-05 Humanitarian programs (DIMA, 2005 (Currently DIAC)). Furthermore, between 2001 and 2005, Iraq was the top country of birth for Humanitarian arrivals in NSW (DIMA, 2006a (Currently DIAC)). Other sources, however, indicate that several thousand Mandaeans have taken up residency in Australia with a large representation in both Liverpool and Fairfield within New South Wales (LMRC, 2004). These Mandaeans arrived through the Skilled and Business Migration categories as well as Refugees and Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) (ibid).



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Pie chart 17: Top ten nationalities assisted under the IHSS 2004–05*



*There is no nationality data available for PPV/TPV/THV/RPV/RPBV holders.

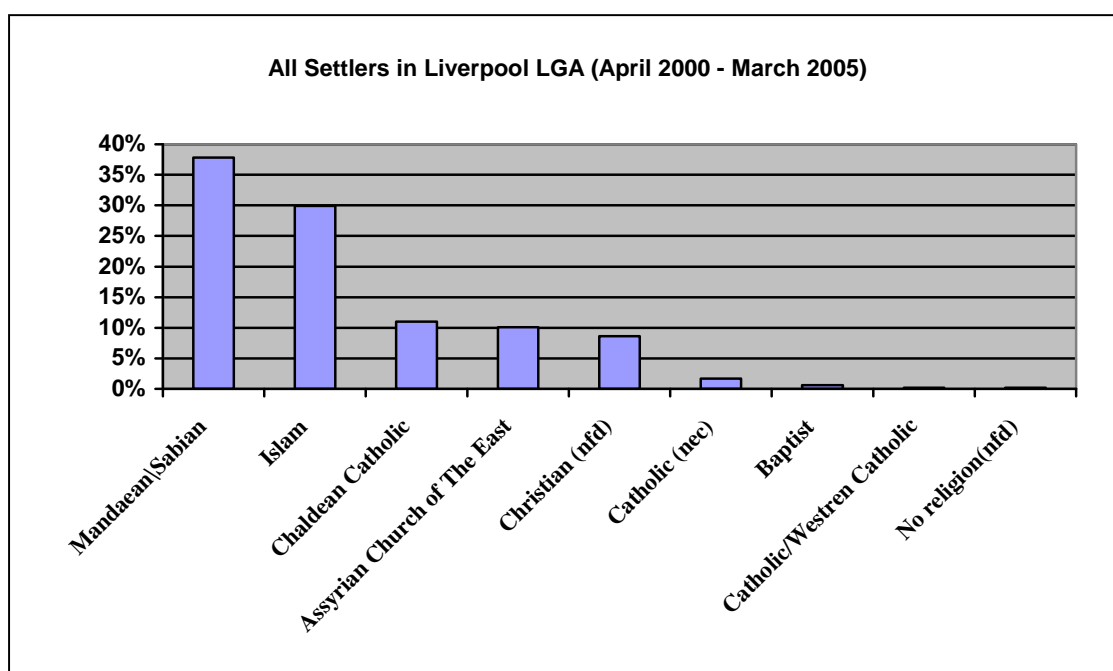
In 2006, Mandaean community leaders estimated there were approximately 3500 to 4000 Madaeans living in Australia with most arrivals residing in the Liverpool LGA (Nashmi, 2006). Nashmi (2005) states that data from DIMA (currently DIAC) indicates that between the 1st of April 2000 and 30th March 2005, 243 Madaeans settled in Liverpool and within this group, 192 stated their religion as 'unknown'. Up until now, the Mandaean religion is not officially categorized in Australian census due to the community's recent establishment.

Many Mandaean people identify themselves As (Baptists) rather than Mandaean out of their beliefs that the main stream community do not know what Mandaean - Soba means. Therefore, their number has been lost within the Baptist population.

In spite of this, it is estimated that during the same five year period, 51% of all settlers arriving in Fairfield and Liverpool were of Mandaean origin and amongst those Madaeans residing in Liverpool, 37.8% were born in Iraq (ibid). In the two months between 1st April 2005 and 30th May 2005, 89.7% of settlers arriving in the Liverpool area identified themselves as Mandaean. Newly arrived Mandaean settlers gravitate to the Liverpool area because of the recent establishment of a Mandaean community there and also because of the presence of religious figures, namely Mandaean priests (Nashmi, 2005).

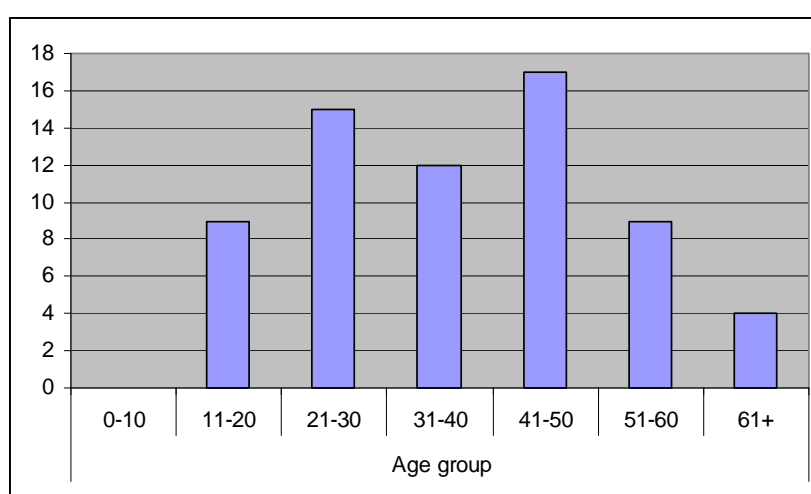


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(Nashmi, 2005)

The Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre conducted consultations with the Mandaean community residing in Liverpool in September 2005 (Nashmi, 2005). The majority of participants indicated that they were between 41 and 50 years of age, closely followed by those aged between 21 and 30 years. There was also a sizeable majority between the ages of 31 and 40 years.



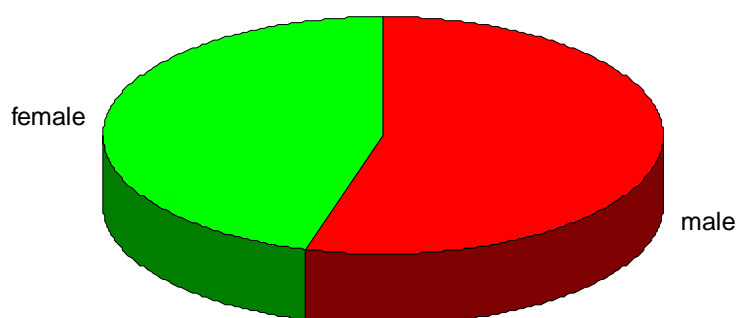
(Nashmi, 2005)



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The traditional language the Mandaean community speaks is Mandaic, which is an Eastern Aramaic Dialect and is mostly spoken by priests (Nashmi, 2006). In addition to this, Iranian Madaeans are known to speak Modern Mandaic (ibid). Throughout the entire Australian Mandaean community, 95% of the Mandaean population is fluent in a language other than English with the vast majority speaking Arabic and a small proportion speaking Farsi (Nashmi, 2006).

Sex Distribution



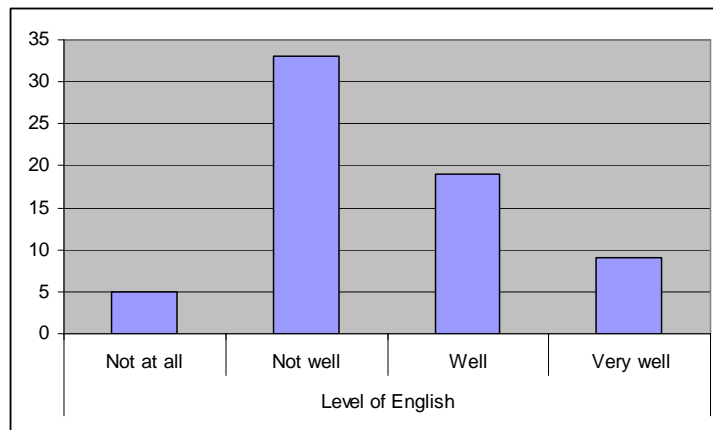
(Nashmi, 2005)

The pie chart above illustrates that the distribution of males and females are roughly equal with males outnumbering females by only 4.5% (Nashmi, 2005). The sex ratio is 120 males for every 100 females. The Mandaean community is family oriented and exhibits an extended family structure (Nashmi, 2006). Throughout the community there is a patriarchal social structure, however, Mandaean philosophy largely promotes gender equality (ibid). Most of the Mandaean participants in the LMRC consultations indicated they were either married (53%) or never married (34.8%) with less than 10% stating they were divorced or separated and less than 5% widow/widowed. Those stating that were never married may be indicative of the large proportion of Madaeans still studying (68.2%). Moreover, less than 5% (4.5%) of the community identified they were employed in some kind of work. Corresponding with this, thirty three persons, or exactly half of the total surveyed (66), stated they did not speak English well and of those that did speak English well, the majority were school age (Nashmi, 2005). Apart from



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communication problems, other difficulties most commonly created through deficient English skills amongst the respondents include low awareness amongst service providers of Mandaean needs and limited information about the availability and access to services, such as interpreting services (ibid).



(Nashmi, 2005)



STARTTS Activities and Group and Community Development work with the Mandaean Community include:

- **STARTTS Early Intervention Program (EIP).** The EIP allows clients to access appropriate services by assessing the needs of individuals who arrive in NSW under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Programs, and people released from Immigration Detention Centres with Protection Visas. After an assessment of various physical, psychological, emotional and resettlement needs the client will be referred to suitable services within or in partnership with STARTTS. The Program is offered during the first year after arrival into Australia because *“all current research indicates that the earlier problems associated with torture or trauma are identified, the more likely successful recovery”* (STARTTS EIP leaflet).
- **Youth Program:** The Mandaean community have participated in the Youth Program offered by STARTTS which runs 4 camps per year with 2 at Rivendell Adolescent Unit (Concord Hospital) and 2 at campsites around NSW and the ACT. Each camp caters for 25 students aged between 10 and 18 years who arrived in Australia less than 10 years ago. The camps aim to target young people who have been exposed to torture and trauma directly or indirectly through family and consequently, have difficulties in resettlement in Australia. A psychotherapeutic model of intervention is used by offering activities for young people to explore their own identity, feelings, and social skills including communication skills and self esteem. Moreover, the Program encourages the development of services for young refugees by identifying gaps in the provision of services as well as offering a consultancy service to those existing in the field.
- **General Services Counseling:** Refugees may have been exposed to various levels of trauma associated with war or organised violence. Refugees may also experience the death of loved ones, separation from family and friends and support networks as well as loss of social roles and status, independence,



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self esteem, property and other material possessions. Exposure to any of these events may result in compromised physical, emotional and psychological integrity.

Trauma counselling is offered to refugees so they can discuss and work through these dilemmas with a trained therapist. Depending on the clients' needs, the length of counselling and the time it takes varies. The services are particularly sensitive to refugee and humanitarian issues as well as individual and cultural expressions of psychological distress. Furthermore, the counselling is confidential and conducted by a bi-cultural and generalist therapist with many having a refugee background and often experienced torture and trauma themselves.

- **Group Work Programs:** Group work programs are run by STARTTS staff and other service providers in partnership with STARTTS. Referral is made through other service providers, family members or through self-referral. Group work aims to reverse the dislocating effects of organised violence which dislodges community solidarity and connection. The Program achieves these ends by offering an opportunity to reconnect with others through group support and learning.

There are many different types of group work offering many different service to clients including the dissemination of information about the services offered by STARTTS; support for groups by incorporating activities and information about services; psycho-educational groups which focus on the effects of trauma and settlement support; and therapeutic groups run by a therapist who allows clients to identify and work through psychological and behavioural effects of trauma. Other groups are specifically offered to include young people, parents and their children; TPV holders and a FICT (Family in Cultural Transition) group which is led by community members to disseminate information and discussion regarding settlement issues for newly arrived refugees.

The Mandaean community participated in a TPV group in 2005 in partnership with House of Welcome.



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- ***Family In Cultural Transition (FICT):*** The FICT group is a psycho-educational group run by community members which prepares clients for the settlement process and to overcome pre-migration trauma issues. The FICT Program assists clients to deal with psychosocial adjustment on an individual and a family level. Participants are also able to develop an appreciation of the ideas behind Australian society and institutions in order to know and uphold their rights. Clients who have participated in the FICT Program are able to go on and become involved in local community development initiatives within their local area.

The Program is facilitated through a Resource Kit incorporating a package of materials for the 10x3 hour session modules. These modules cover family settlement issues such as how to overcome social isolation; how to detect and overcome difficulties; and how to recognise the different perspectives of men, women, children and adolescents in response to their new cultural surroundings.

So far, the Mandaean community has been involved in 2 FICT groups.



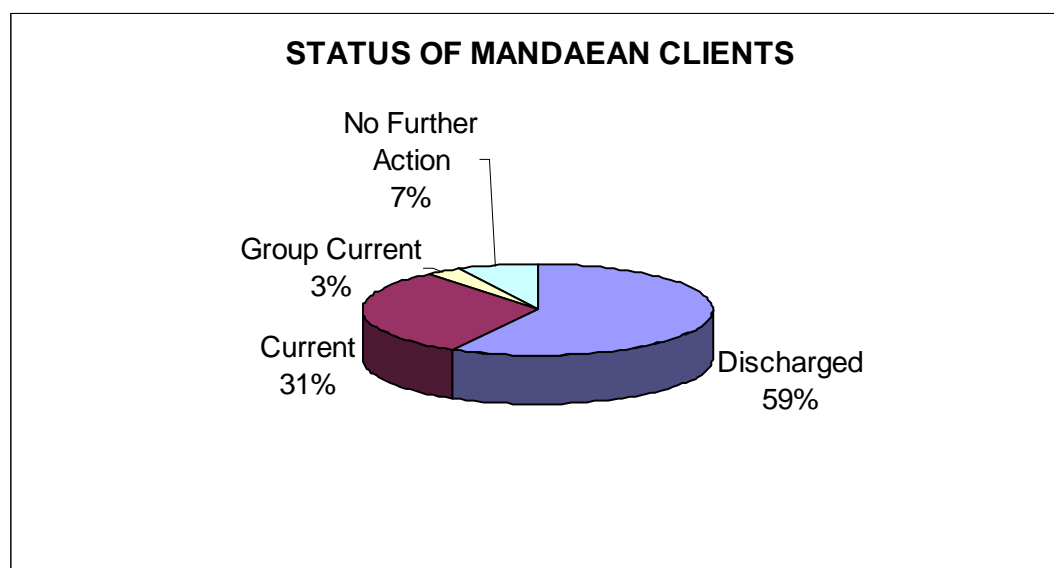
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STARTTS Mandaean Client Data

STATUS OF MANDAEAN CLIENTS AT STARTTS

as at 27 October 2006

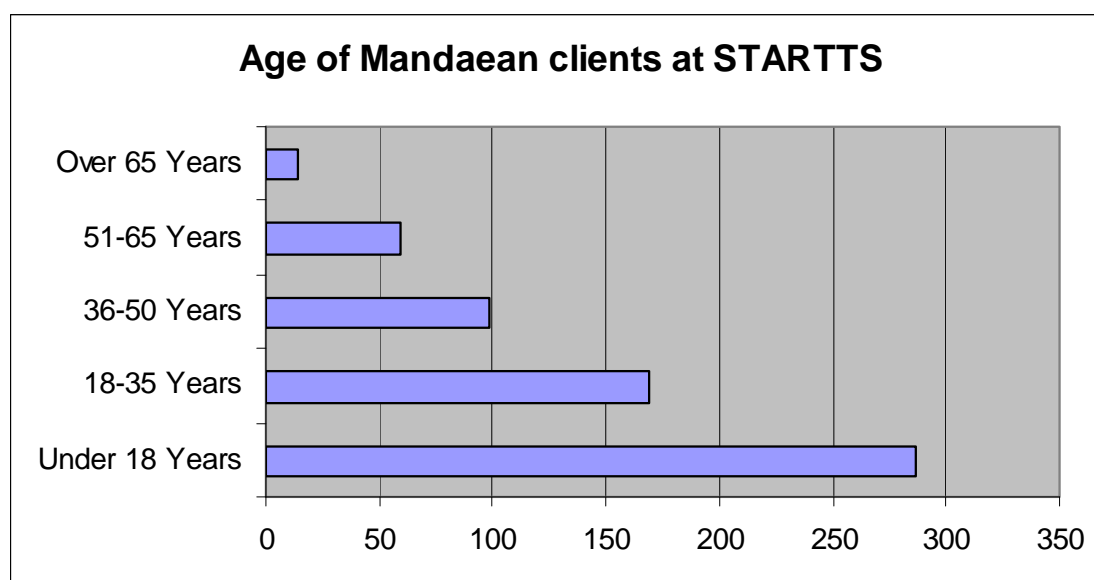
| Client Status | EIP Clients | Gen Serv Clients | Total Clients |
|-------------------------------|-------------|------------------|---------------|
| Discharged (including groups) | 293 | 84 | 350 |
| Current | 177 | 5 | 26 |
| Group Current | 0 | 21 | 182 |
| No Further Action | 40 | 8 | 48 |
| Waiting | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Grand Total | 510 | 118 | 628 |



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AGE OF MANDAEAN CLIENTS AT STARTTS

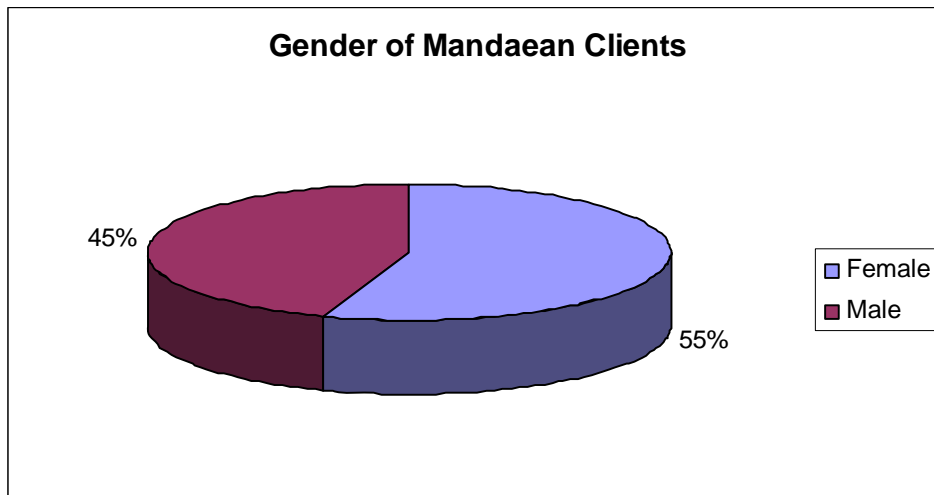
| Client Age | EIP Clients | Gen Serv Clients | Total Clients |
|----------------|-------------|------------------|---------------|
| Under 18 Years | 190 | 97 | 287 |
| 18-35 Years | 160 | 9 | 169 |
| 36-50 Years | 94 | 5 | 99 |
| 51-65 Years | 53 | 6 | 59 |
| Over 65 Years | 13 | 1 | 14 |
| Grand Total | 510 | 118 | 628 |



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GENDER OF MANDAEAN CLIENTS

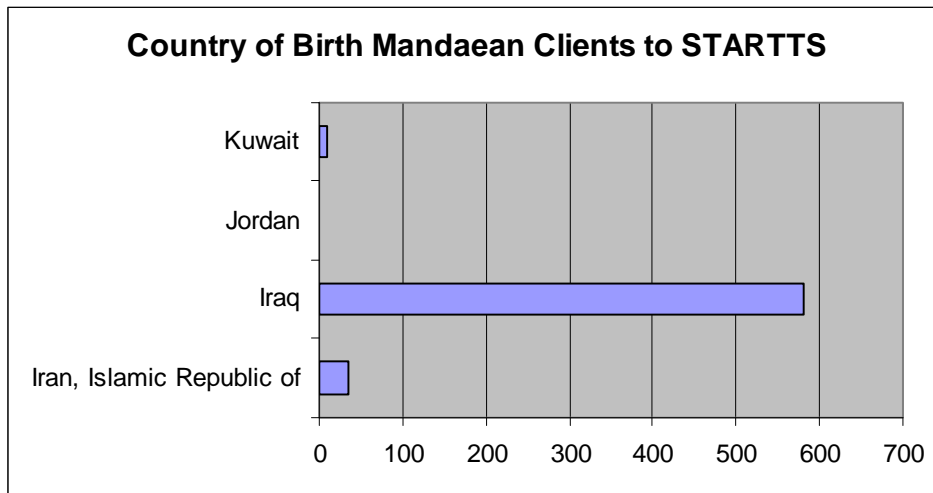
| Client Gender | EIP Clients | Gen Serv Clients | Total Clients |
|---------------|-------------|------------------|---------------|
| Female | 259 | 89 | 348 |
| Male | 251 | 29 | 280 |
| Grand Total | 510 | 118 | 628 |



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COB OF MANDAEAN CLIENTS TO STARTTS

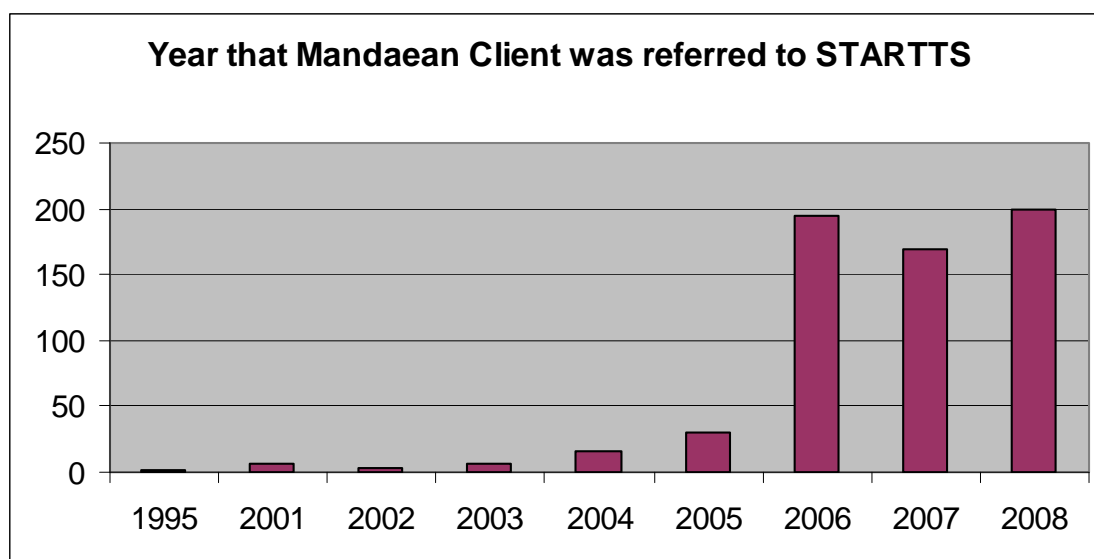
| COB | EIP Clients | Gen Serv Clients | Number of Clients |
|---------------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Iran, Islamic Republic of | 25 | 10 | 35 |
| Iraq | 474 | 108 | 582 |
| Jordan | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Kuwait | 10 | 0 | 10 |
| Grand Total | 510 | 118 | 628 |



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YEAR THAT MANDAEAN CLIENT WAS REFERRED TO STARTTS

| Year Referred | EIP Clients | GS Client | Total Clients |
|---------------|-------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1995 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 2001 | 5 | 1 | 6 |
| 2002 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2003 | 0 | 7 | 7 |
| 2004 | 0 | 16 | 16 |
| 2005 | 0 | 30 | 30 |
| 2006 | 152 | 43 | 195 |
| 2007 | 155 | 14 | 169 |
| 2008 | 197 | 3 | 200 |
| Total | 510 | 118 | 628 |



Process of STARTTS consultations with Mandaean community.

Tribe (1999) and Woodcock (1994) stipulate that unlike earlier studies conducted on refugees which concentrate on pre-migration events, more recent studies show that post-migration experiences such as separation from family, lack of knowledge of the host language and loss of socioeconomic status are important pre-disposing factors for psychological health problems. Interviews with 84 male Iraqi refugees were conducted to find out the importance of social factors in exile and of trauma factors in producing different elements of psychological sequelae of severe trauma. Social factors in exile, especially the level of social support, were shown to be important in determining the level of PTSD and depression (Gorst-Unsworth and Goldenberg, 1998). On the whole, poorer social support was found to be a strong indicator for depression than were trauma factors. It was recommended that planned, integrated rehabilitation programs and attention to social support and family reunion would mitigate against the factors producing morbidity in refugees (ibid).

Thus, STARTTS conducted consultations with the Mandaean community including women's, men's and an English speaking groups. The broad topic areas covered included, STARTTS and its services, the use of counselling and its appropriateness as well as relevant community issues for STARTTS. This section is a compilation of responses from the consultations which took place in October 2006.

The consultation process began in early 2006 with the establishment a meeting of Mandaean community leaders representing a broad section of the Mandaean community. At this meeting the STARTTS process of consulting with communities was discussed and a working planning group was established. Participation in the consultation planning process was very high and a majority of the working group attended all planning meetings.

The community representatives were included in all the decision making which occurred during the planning including the choice of venue, date and time, entertainment and program, question design and in the preparation of the report including being involved in



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revising the report a number of times. Community politics and events in Iraq created difficulties on the process of organising the consultation, However, the success of the consultation is largely the result of the good will and the cooperation of all involved partnership approach used during the process.

STARTTS Services

Specifically, there was interest in knowing how the Mandaean community perceived STARTTS and their role. Firstly, the men's group perceived STARTTS as an 'advocate' and a potential mediator between the Mandaean community and the Australian government, able to increase awareness about the issues Madaeans faced with. STARTTS was seen capable of strengthening the community in Australia so as to increase its capacity to assist those in unsafe areas overseas.

Similarly, the English speaking group saw STARTTS as a medium for informing the government of the Mandaean persecution in both Iran and Iraq. Furthermore, many had left family and friends and were now in constant concern for their safety not only in Iraq but in countries of first asylum: Syria and Jordan. STARTTS was seen as an organization which could facilitate action through their connections with other agencies and 'maybe employ somebody' to conduct research into the needs of Australian Madaeans. The community leaders identified FICT as a valuable service offered by STARTTS and wanted "more FICT groups for Mandaean community'. Finally, to increase the communities understanding of STARTTS, the community leaders suggested 'working with leaders particularly religious leaders'.

In line with the difficulties the Mandaean women experience, such as seeing it 'hard to reunify family' and the need to 'get our voice to all human organizations in Australia', STARTTS was perceived as an organization which could assist with this. In particular, the women stated that to 'reduce our issues we need our people to be here, STARTTS can support our community and get our voices to immigration'. In addition, the Mandaean women were supportive of the FICT service offered by STARTTS as well as its role to strengthen the community, assist with family reunification, and provide counselling.



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Cross Cultural Application of Mental Health Interventions

The Mandaean men were asked how they would know if their community was not well. Some of the indicators of this consist of a lower level of 'social participation, ceremonies, trips and parties'. Other indicators that the community was unwell were a lack of integration in society and children doing less well at school. On an individual level, Mandaean men experience 'depression', 'memory problems', 'lack of concentration', which was attributable to 'past experiences coupled with continual persecution overseas' of family members, 'lack of recognition of world of this genocide', concern for young peoples' future and 'financial problems with trying to support family back home'.

Overall, the Mandaean English speaking group identified advocacy and dissemination of information about Mandaean history and culture to the wider society, so as to raise cultural awareness, as the most appropriate instrument for mental health. This was illustrated in the group saying, 'need ongoing lobbying; will improve mental health state of the Mandaean community'. The English speaking group admitted that many are left in constant state of worry about loved ones overseas with many stating they experience 'depression' coupled with 'poor sleep' and 'poor appetite'. Just as important was the need for a vocational counsellor since joblessness was creating psychological problems. Another factor causing increasing concern amongst the community, especially among the English speaking group, is the maintenance of the Mandaean culture and religion. Leaders are aware that the Mandaean community has dwindled under persecution, and now fear that retention of their culture faces a new threat such as the acculturation of youth.

Community Issues Relevant to STARTTS

All of the Mandaean community groups identified that they required more English tuition. In particular, the women's group stated that '510 hours is not enough' and the men said that they could not 'follow children at school' because of their lack of language skills. The English speaking group also identified that lack of English skills were contributing to



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intra-family problems, such as 'difficulties in communication between children and parents'.

Secondly, all of the three groups consulted spoke of difficulties with gaining employment, especially professional employment, which caused financial problems and prevented those in Australia making 'a new start'. Along side this, both men and women pointed out that qualified and educated Mandeans cannot find work. In particular, the English speaking group suggested there remains a need for 'assistance to career guidance plus qualification recognition and assistance', as well as noting the potential benefits of 'short/bridging courses' so that qualified professionals can gain access to employment.

Another issue facing the Mandaean community, which both the men and women groups agreed on, was the lack of understanding about Australian regulations and values and an inability to access services. In particular, women noted difficulties with Centrelink regarding 'work immediately after two weeks of arrival', and a lack of HACC services. They also expressed concern about gaining access to employment and the formation of social activities. Moreover, Australian values and ways of life were said to have adverse effects on young people with all of the groups agreeing they were concerned about the acculturation of their children. The English speaking group agreed that 'parents feel children and teenagers don't listen'. The English speaking group regarded retention of culture as a large problem facing the Mandaean community alongside other post-settlement problems such as 'gambling', 'broken marriages' and 'men are treating women in old fashioned way'.



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Consultation summary

The Mandaean community groups identified STARTTS as a vital instrument for advocating their historical and continuing persecution, which could be used towards family reunification.

The consultations confirmed that the Mandaean community was experiencing mental health anguish because of this and identified that, other than securing safety for their loved ones, community consultations, counselling and FICT STARTTS services were required.

Resettlement problems in Australia, such as English language skills, access to appropriate employment, a greater understanding of Australian regulations and values, and the acculturation of young people were mentioned by all of the groups involved in the consultations.

The English speaking group highlighted (omitted) family break down and cultural retention as significant problems facing the Mandaean community, which is an indication that these problems lay-wait for those that have been in the country for a longer period of time. Thus, so that their resettlement can be successful, any recommendations and interventions for the community will have to acknowledge both the immediate concerns of new arrivals as well as preventing the long term problems regarding family and the effects from western influences.



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| Recommendations | | | |
|--|---|--|------------------------------------|
| STARTTS & ITS ROLE FOR THE MANDAEAN COMMUNITY | | | |
| Issue raised by focus group | Intervention | Responsibility | Status |
| Promote community strengthening and harmony. | Run FICT groups with community. Provide counselling. Support community initiatives to increase cooperation | FICT Coordinator STARTTS counsellors Community services team and STARTTS Counsellors | Ongoing Ongoing |
| STARTTS play an advocacy role, to get information to all Australian human organisations, including DIMA (currently DIAC)/, about Mandaean community. | Launch the Mandaean Community consultation report Develop a Mandaean case study for STARTTS training programs Include information on Mandaean community at STARTTS training | Working group Arabic Bi Cultural Counsellor Training coordinator | December 08 |
| Resources needed to research Mandaean needs. | Ensure that Mandaean issues are on the STARTTS research agenda. STARTTS is involved in partnership with Psychiatrist Research and teaching units research on Mandaean community | Clinical services and research coordinator Clinical services and research coordinator and Arabic Bi Cultural Counsellor | Ongoing Began November 2006 |



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| Issue raised by focus group | Intervention | Responsibility | Status |
|---|---|--|--------|
| STARTTS work with Mandaean community leaders to raise awareness about their role. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ongoing meetings• Training for leaders, e.g. Accidental Counsellor, governance training advocacy training• Information sessions | Arabic Bi Cultural Counsellor Training and CD teams General | |



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| CAUSES AND SUGGESTIONS TO REDUCE THE OCCURRENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS | | | |
|--|---|---|-----------------------|
| Issue raised by focus group | Intervention | Responsibility | Status |
| Reduce effect of past persecution and current persecution of families overseas. | Media training & support for the leaders. | Public relations | Planning |
| | Promote STARTTS services especially counselling in the Mandaean Newspaper | Public relations | Underway |
| Assist Mandaean community to raise awareness of Mandaean issues. | • Refugee conference. | CS team | Done |
| | • Mandaean speakers at STARTTS events. | Various | Ongoing |
| | • Systemic advocacy course-access. | CD worker | Ongoing as they occur |
| | • Media training and support. | CS Team | Ongoing |
| | • Article in Transitions. | Public relations | Done |
| | • Work towards finding a way to produce a documentary about Mandaeans. | CD worker and Arabic Bi Cultural Counsellor | Began March 2007 |
| Concern for young people's future and to minimize the effects of acculturation. | • Assistance with Website | Public relations | Underway |
| | • Raise awareness among youth service providers in Liverpool about Mandaean community issues; training community and STARTTS. | Youth Staff | Planning 2009 |
| | • Trial: TIPS Course for Mandaean parents; conversation with parents and youth service providers. | FICT workers | Planning 2009 |



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| COMMUNITY ISSUES RELEVANT TO STARTTS | | | |
|--|---|---|---------------|
| Issue | Intervention | Responsibility | Status |
| Financial problems caused by attempting to support family members in country of origin. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Referral to career advisor; voluntary work in preferred occupation. Job Network members training. | <p>Counsellors</p> <p>Training team</p> | Ongoing |
| Efforts to maintain culture and religion within Mandaean diaspora in Australia. | Support community initiatives and follow up through on-going meetings with Mandaean leaders. | Arabic Bi Cultural Counsellor and EIP counsellors Liverpool | Ongoing |
| Refugees need more than 510hrs of English tuition. To reach a functional level of English competency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise with appropriate forums. Inform the Mandaean leaders about other E.L.Programs such as LLNP | All STARTTS staff who attend | Done |
| | | Arabic Bi Cultural Counsellor and EIP Counsellor | Ongoing |
| Assistance with gaining appropriate employment and advice on gaining recognition of qualifications. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On a case by case basis make referral to career advisor; initiate voluntary work in preferred occupation; short bridging courses. Training for appropriate service providers regarding Mandaean and in partnership with e.g.: Job Network, LLNP providers and PSP. | <p>STARTTS counsellors</p> <p>Training coordinator</p> | Ongoing |



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| Issue | Intervention | Responsibility | Status |
|---|--|---|---|
| <p>Increase level of understanding about Australian regulations and values as well as access to services; e.g. Centrelink for new arrivals, HACC for the senior members of the community.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for leaders about service systems especially employment related (DEWR). • More information about service systems to leaders. • Raise issues with HACC providers. • Training both service providers and community leaders. | <p>CS team</p> <p>CS Team</p> <p>CS coordinator</p> <p>Training Coordinator</p> | <p>Planning 2009</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |
| <p>Formation of social activities particularly for the youth (acculturation) and Mandaean women.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STARTTS to find out what is already happening in this area and how we can support that. • Mandaean volunteers to receive bus training; participate in the STARTTS Volunteer Bus Driver Project. • Make sure the Mandaean community knows about STARTTS youth activities. | <p>Working party</p> <p>CD worker</p> <p>Youth and CD workers</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Done</p> |



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| Issue | Intervention | Responsibility | Status |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <p>Post-settlement problems associated with acculturation: gambling and broken marriages.</p> | <p>Promote STARTTS services to the community through community media</p> | <p>Public relations officer</p> | <p>Underway</p> |
| | <p>Promote Centre for mental health, multicultural gambling services and relationship services to community</p> | <p>CD worker</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| | <p>Link community into cultural appropriate service providers</p> | <p>Cs Team and counselling staff</p> | <p>Ongoing</p> |
| | <p>Work with Mandaean religious leaders for them to receive training in the fields of gambling and relationships</p> | <p>Arabic Bi cultural counsellor</p> | |



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