

The Islamic Association of Raleigh
Raleigh, North Carolina

An Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis:
Findings and Next Steps of Action

May 2005

Emily Burrows
Malea Hoepf
Sarah Lillie
Aisha Moore
Christina Rowland
Caroline Whalen

Preceptor: Ahmad-Rufai Abdullah, DVM, MPH

Instructors: Eugenia Eng, DrPH, and Kate Shirah, MPH

Completed during 2004-2005 in partial fulfillment of requirements for HBHE 241
Department of Health Behavior and Health Education
School of Public Health
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Table of Contents

1. EXECUTIVE STATEMENT	1
2. PROJECT OVERVIEW	2
2a. The Preceptor’s Role	2
2b. The Team’s Role	2
2c. Definition of the Community	3
2d. History of the Islamic Center	5
2e. Location of the Community	6
3. MAJOR THEMES	7
3a. Overarching Theme: Physical Space	8
Service Provider Perspective	
Community Member Perspective	
Researcher Perspective	
Forum Action Steps	
3b. Theme One: Social and Welfare Services	12
Service Provider Perspective	
Community Member Perspective	
Researcher Perspective	
Forum Action Steps	
3c. Theme Two: Relations with Non-Muslims	15
Service Provider Perspective	
Community Member Perspective	
Researcher Perspective	
Forum Action Steps	
3d. Theme Three: Youth	20
Service Provider Perspective	
Community Member Perspective	
Researcher Perspective	
Forum Action Steps	
3e. Theme Four: Volunteerism	25
Service Provider Perspective	
Community Member Perspective	
Researcher Perspective	
Forum Action Steps	
4. METHODOLOGY	29
4a. Secondary Data	29
4b. Primary Data	30
4c. Forum Planning Process	36
5. CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS	40

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guides, recruitment consent forms, and fact sheets

Appendix B: Interviewee and focus group characteristics

Appendix C: Secondary sources

Appendix D: Community Forum materials

Appendix E: IRB approval letter

Appendix F: Contact email template

Appendix G: IAR Committees and roles

Appendix H: Data analysis codebook

Appendix I: Small group discussion techniques

Appendix J: AOCD team's list of activities

Appendix K: Reflections on the team's field experience

Appendix L: References on Islam

Appendix M: Glossary of terms

Appendix N: Thank you to donors

EXECUTIVE STATEMENT

From September 2004 to April 2005, six first year Master of Public Health students from the School of Public Health, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, completed an Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis (AOCD) of the Islamic Association of Raleigh (IAR), under the guidance of Dr. Ahmad-Rufai Abdullah. A purpose of the AOCD is to develop a partnership between the student practitioners and the community. This AOCD examined what life is like for Muslims living in the greater Triangle area. The AOCD used both primary data, collected through interviews and focus groups with thirteen service providers and twenty five community members, as well as secondary data, to identify the strengths and needs of the IAR community.

The strengths of the community included a highly diverse population, a wide variety of services available to the community, a leadership body that is responsive to community needs, a very active core of volunteers, and a strong sense of identity and purpose. The areas of concern and several of the corresponding action steps were:

- Social and welfare services: create a resource booklet, increase awareness of the IAR food pantry, hire a full time psychologist, raise additional funds.
- Relations with non-Muslims: hold a workshop on how to relate to non-Muslims, volunteer in non-Muslim organizations, build bridges with other communities.
- Youth: have Muslims youth spend time with other Muslims, hold parent-training groups, have workshops for Muslims youth who are unsure of their religion.
- Volunteerism: formalize volunteer requirements, make announcements about volunteer opportunities during Friday lectures, post opportunities on IAR website.

The findings were presented to the community at a community forum, held at the IAR on April 22, 2005, for discussion and to determine specific action steps.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

During the fall of 2004, a team of public health graduate students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was invited by Dr. Ahmad-Rufai Abdullah to conduct an Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis (AOCD) with the Islamic Association of Raleigh (IAR) community. The goal of an AOCD is to view the world through the eyes of those involved in the community. An AOCD attempts this by using natural networks within the community to identify strengths and needs in conjunction with secondary data, and then encouraging the community to identify specific action steps to address and resolve the issues uncovered through this process.

The Preceptor's Role

Dr. Abdullah serves on the Executive Committee of the IAR. As preceptor, his responsibilities included introducing the team to the IAR community, serving as the team's liaison to the community, and orienting them to the community culture and decision-making structure. His role as a community leader, and his support for the AOCD project facilitated the team's entry into and collaboration with this community.

The Team's Role

As outsiders conducting an AOCD, the team's responsibilities included: collecting secondary data; collecting and analyzing primary data, in the form of individual interviews and focus groups; and organizing and facilitating a community forum, during which time the community comes together to address the team's findings and identify action steps to address needs [for a more detailed description of the team's methods, see section 4]. Because an AOCD relies heavily on interaction between the team and the community, a warm reception and acceptance by the community is essential. It is necessary for both the team and the community to become comfortable with one another, to ensure openness and trust.

In order to gain entrée, the team participated in a formal introduction to the IAR community, led by Dr. Abdullah. The team was given a forty-five minute presentation by the Da'wah committee, the official outreach arm of the IAR. The presentation covered the history of the center, as well as details on the history and practices of Islam. It is emphasized that the IAR is not only a place of worship, it is also the community's center, offering a variety of services and activities. The team was invited to attend and observe many of these activities, including Jummah prayer on Friday afternoons, Friday night program presentations, and religious classes for both Muslims and non-Muslims. Through these activities, the team had the opportunity to engage with community members and learn more about the structure and organization of the community – both necessary components for conducting a thorough and accurate AOCD.

Definition of the Community

The Muslim population in the greater Triangle area of North Carolina is extremely diverse. Estimates place the number of Muslims living in the Triangle at over 10,000, originating from approximately 70 countries, of which 20 percent are estimated to be American-born African American.¹ While religion is not captured in census data, 2,577 people living in Raleigh claimed descent from an Arab nation, as well as 749 from Nigeria, and 62 from Sudan. Furthermore, according to 2000 census data, 2,130 people in Raleigh reported speaking Arabic at home, and 320 reported speaking Urdu at home. The Muslim population in Raleigh has experienced tremendous growth in the last decade: of foreign-born Asians living in Raleigh, 2,338 arrived between 1980 and 1990, and 5,241 between 1990 and 2000; of foreign-born Africans in the city, 736 arrived between 1980 and 1990, and 2,462 between 1990 and 2000.² Beyond this information, the diversity and growth of the Muslim population in Raleigh is clear, yet difficult to quantify.

Muslims at the IAR belong to various Islamic sects, including Sunni, Shi'ite and Sufi. All sects are united under the common threads of Islam, such as the belief in Muhammad (pbuh) as the last prophet and the Qur'an as the holy book. However, differences exist in the various sects' interpretation and practices of the religion. [See Appendix L].

The Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis team was invited by Dr. Ahmad-Rufai Abdullah to work with the Islamic Association of Raleigh (IAR) community. The IAR campus consists of a mosque (henceforth referred to in Arabic as the 'Masjid'), three Islamic schools, and a community center. It is located in Southwest Raleigh at 808 Atwater Street. The IAR serves an estimated 1,500 Muslims - most of whom are Sunni - and has a core membership of approximately 300 members who pay dues. These members as well as non-members help organize and initiate the activities and services offered by the IAR. Members of the IAR elect the Majlis As-Shura, which in turn appoints the Executive Committees – governing bodies that make decisions regarding the operation of the IAR [see Appendix G].

For the purposes of this AOCD project, we have defined our community as a relational community comprised of people receiving and providing services through the IAR, which includes over a thousand Muslims in the Triangle area with diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

The History of the Islamic Center of Raleigh

The IAR activities officially began in 1981, when Triangle area immigrant Muslims formed the Islamic Association of North Carolina. Friday prayers were held first at an apartment complex in Raleigh, and later in Southwest Raleigh on the campus of North Carolina State University, where many members of the original IAR founders studied. Prayers on major holidays, such as Eid al-Fitr at the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, were held in parking lots. The NC State University chapter of the Muslim Students' Association (MSA), along with the local Muslim residents, began fundraising for a Masjid in 1984, also gathering funds from outside sources in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. In 1985, construction began on the original Masjid, built on a plot of land adjacent to NC State University in the Historic Method neighborhood. In 1986, the IAR hired a full-time Imam from Syria, Imam Baianonie, who continues to be the religious leader.

By 1988, a second floor had been added to the original Masjid structure, and the IAR expanded its services to include the Al-Furqan Sunday Islamic School for Muslim children,³ which by 2004 had expanded to include 300 students.⁴ In 1992, the IAR began the Al-Iman school, a full-time Islamic school offering kindergarten classes, which eventually expanded to eighth grade.⁵ In 2004, the school ranked eighth out of 81 schools in Wake County in end-of-grade testing, and ranked first in math and reading in middle school end-of-grade testing.⁶ Further focus on young people in the community led to the creation of the Youth committee to organize activities for young people in 1993. As the community expanded and members became more settled in the Triangle area, a need for funerals and burials that followed Islamic tradition led the IAR to decide to purchase land in Wake County for a Muslim cemetery, and the

formation of a cemetery committee to negotiate services with funeral homes and to ensure proper burial for community members⁷.

By 1999, the IAR had grown so significantly that the IAR purchased adjacent property and built a new Masjid with a prayer hall that could hold both men and women (referred to as brothers and sisters), and a gymnasium. They also opened the Al-Maida kitchen and allowed Al-Iman School to use the entire old building for its classes. In 2000, another educational opportunity, the Al-Bayan school for Qu'ran memorization, started. Membership had expanded to the point that Friday prayers, which are required to be performed at the Masjid for brothers and encouraged for sisters, had to be performed in shifts to accommodate all participants, and to allow for adequate parking.⁸ Currently, the IAR is in the midst of an expansion project that will increase the size of the current IAR Masjid from 15,000 to 48,000 square feet. Construction for the project began on March 7, 2005, and already 1.2 million dollars have been raised for the \$3.2 million project.⁹

Location of Community Center

The neighborhood in Southwest Raleigh in which the IAR is located is a historically African-American community with strong historical roots. At the end of the civil war, the city of Raleigh was a popular city for freed slaves, and, as a result of the influx of new residents, property values increased. To help offset the rising prices, two freedmen purchased 69 acres of land three miles outside Raleigh, and subdivided it into housing sites affordable for the newly freed slaves, many of whom worked as farmers. The settlement was known as "Slabtown" or "Save-Rent" until 1890, when it was renamed Method by the railroad company whose tracks bordered the edge of the community. Today, some current residents live on property that has been in their family for over a century.¹⁰

The IAR rests on a plot of land in the middle of a block in this neighborhood, now known as Historic Method. Because of the historical roots of the surrounding community, the growth of the IAR and the related expansion of its building have not been without controversy. In 2003, when the IAR received permission to expand its facilities from the Raleigh City Council, the decision was protested by the Method Civic League. The League, founded in 1937, cited ongoing traffic problems caused by worshippers on Friday afternoons and complained that the IAR did not communicate its plans with the surrounding neighborhood residents.¹¹ The City Council upheld its decision, and some arrangements were made to alleviate the on-street parking situation. However, because there was no working relationship with the IAR, it was difficult for the neighboring African-American community to open its doors, as indicated by this statement, made by the interim president of the Method Civic League: “[The IAR] broke our trust. It makes me wonder what’s really going on. What are they up to?”¹² Though there was no formal contract between the IAR and the Historic Method neighborhood, the tensions increased IAR community awareness that outreach to the surrounding neighborhood was necessary, as well as underscored the importance of participating in local government.

MAJOR THEMES

In order to gain an understanding of the community, team members conducted interviews and focus groups with many IAR service providers and community members. From the interviews and focus groups multiple themes emerged about both the strengths and the needs of the community. The most dominant of these themes were presented to the Forum Planning Committee, whose members chose the most appropriate ones to address at the community forum. These chosen themes were then discussed by the community during small discussion groups at

the community forum, held on April 22, 2005 [see Section 4c for further detail on the community forum].

The AOCD process generally classifies service providers as community outsiders who maintain relationships with the community for professional reasons. However, due to the wide variety of services available through the IAR, the team identified service providers as those people who hold leadership positions within the IAR, such as Shura and Executive Committee members [see Appendix B]. Community members were identified by the team as anyone who has an association with the IAR, whether as a volunteer with a committee or as someone who simply seeks prayer space or an Islamic education at the Masjid. The researchers' perspective comes from the team members' observations reported and documented in their field notes. [See the sections 4a and 4b for further detail on primary and secondary data collection]. Action steps to address the needs associated with each theme were designated by the small discussion groups at the community forum.

Overarching Theme: Physical Space

There is a limited amount of physical space to accommodate the rapidly growing community.

Service Provider Perspective

People want more time, space, and hours for the community center to be open, but we are restricted. We cannot build all that we want.

-Service provider

Most service providers brought up the IAR's physical facilities as both an asset and a limitation of the community. Though it started with one floor of one building, the IAR has expanded to include a second building with a Masjid and a multi-purpose gymnasium, while the original building was converted into a two-story school building. Many service providers brought up this expansion as a strength of the IAR. One service provider described the IAR as an

“oasis,” which also includes a gymnasium and a kitchen in the new building and a school in the old building.

Despite the assets of the physical attributes of the IAR, the expansion has not been sufficient to accommodate the continuously growing community. The IAR’s physical structure was mentioned by many service providers as a weakness: “In terms of problems I think just the physical facility is too small than what we need to serve the community.” Space is a dominant concern, especially on Fridays and during holidays, such as Eid. One service provider shared his feelings with us: “I would really hope that this expansion project would be in a bigger place where the people would enjoy their time more. You’ve been there on Friday nights and seen how it is. It’s too congested on Friday nights.” Due to the space limitations, Jummah prayer has been divided into three shifts in an effort to lessen some of the overcrowding. Others mentioned that the available services and facilities draw new Muslim families to the area, further accelerating the growth of the community and creating unexpected demand for more space.

This spring, the IAR will begin a second phase expansion project - one that service providers are hopeful will help alleviate space constraints and parking problems. Because the size of the IAR was mentioned as a limitation of the community, the expansion was brought up often and usually in a positive light.

Community Member Perspective

We have intentions and we have plans, and because of the lack of physical facilities, we can’t implement them.

-Community Member

The community members of the IAR generally recognize the incredible growth the community has experienced within the past decade. But, as one community member mentioned, “if there are more people, there are more problems.” Among the problems of having a booming

community is the issue of limited physical space. Like the service providers, community members were honest about the need for expansion due to the current physical constraints at the IAR. Some community members seemed to understand that one expansion project could not satisfy such a growing community. One member explained, “the expansion project we’re embarking on is going to help a lot, but no sooner do we expand and then we just fill it up again, because we’ve been doubling every so many years.”

The expansion project was still felt to be necessary and looked upon favorably, despite questions of how well it could accommodate the IAR community in the near future. In one focus group, a community member reminded the others to keep the problems of physical space limitations in perspective: “...you gotta realize twenty-five years ago...there wasn’t even a Masjid here...the community, for what they’ve done in the time period they’ve done it in, is a miracle.”

Researcher Perspective

The Eid prayer was held at the Durham Marriot because the IAR could not accommodate the amount of people that usually come to Eid prayer. There was traffic in the immediate area but they had men with orange flags directing people to parking.

-AOCD Team Member

Community members and service providers stressed to team members the explosion in the number of community members who use the IAR, and the team noticed the need for physical space the IAR community faces first-hand. When two team members visited the Al-Furqan school, they witnessed many children attending classes in the six trailers behind the school building. The number of children enrolled at the IAR schools exceed the main building’s capacity, forcing the school to utilize modular units.

The first Jummah prayer observed by the team occurred during the month of Ramadan. There was difficulty fitting all of the brothers (for whom prayer at that time is compulsory) into

the Masjid, and many men spilled into the gym for prayer, which is typically reserved for use by women and children during that time. On several other occasions, team members found themselves in major traffic in the IAR's parking lot. Some community members explained that some people must park in the NC State campus lots when they come to pray at the Masjid. Members of the safety and security committee are frequently visible at heavy prayer time, directing traffic in the crowded parking lot.

Team members further cited the limited potential for further physical expansion due to the surrounding neighborhood. They noted that the IAR is located in the midst of a residential block, with many houses and apartment complexes directly bordering the IAR campus. The parking lot, school buildings, playground, and Masjid consume all land space available on the IAR's current plot, such that further expansion outwards seems impossible without acquiring and demolishing neighboring homes.

Forum Action Steps

The Forum Planning Committee decided to make physical space an overarching theme to be incorporated into each small group discussion as opposed to a theme on which a group discussion would be focused. This decision reflected much consideration, and the conclusion that although the limited physical space is an important issue, there is little community members can do to change the situation. Physical space also relates to the other themes addressed at the community forum, and so it was suggested as an overarching theme for community members to keep in mind during their discussions. However, physical space became overlooked as a theme during the small group discussions and was not visible in any of the action steps decided upon by the groups.

Theme #1: Social and Welfare Services

There is a lack of social and welfare services for people within the community, including counseling services and services for people with financial difficulties.

Service Provider Perspective

We have shortcoming in, for example, shelters in social welfare. If someone is evicted, we have a problem on our hands. If [there is] spousal abuse, something of that nature, we have a problem on our hands.

Sometimes we do pay the rent [for those facing economic hardship], but we tell them that if we pay the rent we do not have that much money. If we do pay the rent, we pay for the month, and if you come back to us, even the next month, we cannot help you.

- Service Providers

When queried about the types of jobs community members tend to hold at the IAR, service providers were likely to mention positions requiring a high level of education, such as doctors, engineers, and professors. However, some service providers did explain that not all community members hold such jobs. As in any community, some members have no financial worries while others may have many. At the IAR, one service provider told us, “there are a lot of people who are below the poverty line in our community. There are people who are a little bit above that are really struggling.” To help these members the IAR operates the Social and Welfare Committee, which provides financial assistance and food to community members in need. However, because resources are limited and the committee relies almost entirely on volunteers and donations, they often are unable to do the amount of work that is necessary. One service provider spoke of the importance of the Social and Welfare Committee, and identified some of its limitations because “[the IAR] still does not grasp the entire system on how to direct every and each one to go and acquire the information and the help from a certain system or group.” This service provider felt that improving upon this roadblock would help the functioning of the IAR’s Social and Welfare Committee.

In addition to financial assistance services, some service providers cited the need for the IAR to provide counseling services. One service provider described this need: “community members deal with problems with their children, teenagers, drugs, and psychological problems. We need a social service department which will hopefully be developed in the future.” Under the current system at the IAR, any concerns similar to those mentioned in the previous quote are directed toward the Imam. Though respectful of the Imam’s wisdom and advice, some service providers mentioned that the IAR needs an official counselor, or at least a system through which people can be referred to these professional services. One service provider explained that “counseling is not addressed. There is no counseling whatsoever. We need a social service department.” Whether for financial or counseling reasons, it is apparent that there is a call for increased or new services.

Community Member Perspective

...More basic services, like employment services, or homeless shelters or something. It would be nice to just have basic services for people in the community. It’s like we were talking about, a lot of people here are very, very well qualified, and that are doing great, and there are others who aren’t.

- Community Member

Like service providers, community members also identified mainly highly educated occupations when asked about the typical jobs held by IAR community members. However, though no community members specifically mentioned the Social and Welfare committee by name (indicating a need for more advertising of the IAR’s existing services), some suggested the IAR should be providing social and welfare services. The services most frequently mentioned included employment services and shelters for those without homes. Some mentioned that these services should be for IAR members only, while others thought they should be provided to the community at large. Additionally, community members identified that the IAR alone can not

help solve financial difficulty, and community members must also look outwards: “Welfare is not just in the mosque, you’d have to apply somewhere else, too - we don’t have that much money!” This notion was brought up in service provider interviews, although service providers tended to suggest that the IAR establish relationships with these outside resources, whereas community members did not.

Researcher Perspective

I do not think there are many similar [mental health] services available, and I would be interested to learn more about [the] practice, if there is a lot of demand for such services, and the view of mental health services in Islam.

-AOCD Team Member

The team became aware of the presence of the Social and Welfare committee at the IAR soon after the initial introduction to the community during conversations with several service providers who frequently mentioned these services during informal conversation. Although team members were not able to observe the activities of the committee, some details were obtained during these conversations. Two team members were informed that the committee, although it operates with limited funding, works hard to make the most of the money allotted for the welfare needs of both members of the IAR community and neighboring community residents.

From mingling with sisters on Friday evenings, team members learned that some community members struggle with basic food and shelter needs as well as specific healthcare needs like health insurance and medical prescriptions. Though team members cited these concerns in their field notes, they also noticed that the IAR makes an effort to address these needs through events such as the IAR and Historic Method neighborhood-sponsored health fair. Two team members attended the health fair, which provided health information on a variety of topics, including depression and diabetes, blood pressure and vision screenings, and free products to both IAR and neighborhood community members.

Forum Action Steps

Both the brothers' and sisters' small group discussions on social and welfare services were large and animated. The sisters' discussion group included the head of the IAR food pantry, as well as a woman who was working on the creation of a free health clinic for the Muslim community. The women's group suggested the following action steps: creating a resource booklet with numbers and names of service providers; increasing awareness of IAR food pantry while decreasing the stigma of using the service; creating a free clinic with medical services for families; and identifying people in the community professionally trained as counselors, including marriage and family counselors, while acknowledging the stigma associated with accessing mental health services in the community. Volunteers agreed to take on each action step.

The men's group identified the following as action steps: getting more funding from local government for social services; hiring a full time counselor/psychologist; getting outside help from the unemployment commission; offering more financial support to community members, including raising immediate fund for families in need, and raising funds for the social and welfare committee. Finally, they recommended promoting motivation and self-confidence for people in the community facing economic hardship.

Theme #2: Relations with Non-Muslims

There is a need to increase non-Muslims' understanding of Islam and the Muslim community, especially among the residents of the surrounding neighborhood.

Service Provider Perspective

Before 9/11, all our focus was on issues within the community. After 9/11, we found out that that is not the right way; we still have the need inside, but also we need to fulfill the need outside, be part of politics, part of the whole community.

When we started the IAR 15 or 20 years ago, we were preoccupied with being settled. But we should be cognizant of the surrounding community and participate in the community we live in.

- Service Providers

Over the past four years, the IAR has made an increased effort to reach out to non-Muslims in the neighborhood as well as in the Triangle area. The Da'wah (or Outreach) committee is in fact focused specifically on outreach activities, offering lectures about Islam for non-Muslims, visiting churches and schools, and initiating what one service provider termed an "open door policy," opening the Masjid to all people, regardless of their religion. Almost all of the service providers cited the Da'wah committee when speaking about relations between the IAR community and non-Muslims, agreeing that the Da'wah committee has been a success, and has fostered good relationships with non-Muslims.

Some service providers cited the events of September 11, 2001 as the point in time when the Muslim community realized the importance of reaching out to non-Muslims. As one service provider put it, "we had to give a greater priority to opening up to the people around us and showing them who we are. Let people come and visit us and show them what we are doing here and how we can contribute to the community at large." One service provider mentioned that the media spotlight put on Muslims after September 11, 2001 also revealed how little non-Muslims knew about Islam. Another service provider spoke of bringing non-Muslims to the IAR: "[non-Muslims] feel that they have kept themselves away for some reason or another. Maybe they listen to the media or they were told by friends this was not a place to go or whatever...it just makes me happy as a Muslim that people are starting to understand."

The extent of the IAR's consciousness of the need to reach out to non-Muslims is visible in new community projects. The IAR is considering opening a free health clinic, where

physicians within the community volunteer their time in order to offer free health services to both Muslim and non-Muslims in the area. Many service providers stressed that the clinic would be open to the non-Muslim neighbors, as a way to bridge gaps. One service provider quoted the prophet Muhammed (pbuh) to stress the importance of reaching out to surrounding community: “your neighbors should not go hungry at night when you are full-bellied.” Establishing such a clinic and making it available to neighborhood residents might also help alleviate tensions between the neighborhood and the IAR community that have developed over the expansion of the IAR and issues with overcrowding and parking as mentioned previously.

Community Member Perspective

One guy said, “Are you a Muhammeden? You’re going to hell!” ...After that, he started asking questions, but if I had walked away, he wouldn’t have learned about things and it would have been really bad.

- Community Member

During discussions about the need for increasing non-Muslims’ understanding of Islam, many community members spoke of their personal relationships with non-Muslims. One member explained, “I’ve always had best friends who were non-Muslim. And I’ve always been in neighborhoods with non-Muslims...it was never a problem. I was open about my religion, and they just accepted it.” The idea of being “open” about one’s religion in order to encourage positive relations between non-Muslims and Muslims was echoed by other community members, many of whom cited the Da’wah committee as a way to do so.

Like the service providers, community members saw the Da’wah committee as one of IAR’s biggest strengths and successes. They also mentioned that it serves a need that was not fully realized until after September 11, 2001. However, some community members admit there is still much work to be done to create positive relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. They

emphasized that this must be seen as a personal responsibility, a distinction service providers did not make, as evidenced in the statement, “we are obligated to provide and communicate with our neighbors.” Overall, community members agreed with service providers that open outreach to non-Muslims is essential to reduce prejudice and misunderstanding, and that this importance has increased since the domestic terrorist attacks in 2001. However, community members emphasized the personal responsibility of each Muslim to engage in such outreach, in addition to the activities of the Da’wah committee.

Researcher Perspective

A woman in the audience raises her hand and says that she thinks Americans think that Allah is something different from God, and the man replies that he thinks that is true and wrong.

- AOCD Team Member

The team noticed that there are many misunderstandings and questions regarding Muslims and Islam coming from the non-Muslim population. From the experience of team members, however, non-Muslims can learn and clarify misconceptions about Islam simply by interacting with Muslims on a day-to-day basis.

Members of the IAR community made a deliberate effort to reach out to non-Muslims, by both explaining Islam and openly answering all team members’ questions regarding the religion and its practices. Furthermore, community members welcomed the team into the IAR community on each visit. Women frequently introduced themselves to the team, graciously offered to answer questions, and asked about the team’s perspective. Each team member mentioned the hospitality and openness shown by the IAR community, and several reference occasions when they observed other visitors similarly embraced and welcomed into the Masjid. One team member described this, saying, “I have noticed at each event I have attended within the community that people, usually the women, are extremely friendly and welcoming, at least a couple people

approaching us to offer help, answer questions. They usually specifically ask if I have questions about the religion/practices, but general help is offered as well.”

Team members noted the Da’wah committee’s willingness to educate all visitors to the IAR. In addition to the introduction to the IAR community, the team members have been encouraged to attend other Da’wah committee presentations to students at local universities, and to visit with committee members who host classes on Islam for non-Muslims on a weekly basis. Like community members and service providers, the team noted this committee as an asset of the IAR. Anyone who wishes to visit the IAR or needs information should initiate contact with the Da’wah committee.

Finally, team members noted that the AOCD process itself facilitated interaction between Muslims and non-Muslims. Each team member highlighted the feeling that outreach is a priority in the IAR community, and that during visits people seemed particularly interested in the AOCD project because it brought non-Muslims to the community center.

Forum Action Steps

The small discussion groups for relations with non-Muslims were the largest groups for both the sisters and the brothers. Both the sisters’ and brothers’ discussion groups came up with action steps that reflected the importance of Muslims’ outreach to non-Muslims. However, both groups also recognized the importance of looking inward at their own prejudices and dedication to Islam before such an effective outreach is possible.

The sisters decided on the following action steps: having more interaction with non-Muslims; disposing of their own ideas and prejudices of non-Muslims; educating Muslims on how to relate to non-Muslims and their responsibility to relate to others, starting with a workshop; volunteering in non-Muslim organizations; reducing prejudices among Muslims by

having “American” Muslims working with “non-American” Muslims; getting involved in the political process.

The brothers chose these action steps: educating the community about non-Muslims; becoming involved in outside communities; building bridges with other communities; using media to disseminate information; removing a Muslim’s fear of governmental inquiry, which may stand as a barrier to interaction with non-Muslims; “living” Islam as a model Muslim. These action steps show that the sisters and brothers involved in the discussion groups are thinking of ways to foster positive relations between Muslims and non-Muslims; if these action steps are carried out, hopefully such relations will come to pass.

Theme #3: Youth
It is challenging for youth to maintain their cultural
identity in a non-Muslim environment.

Service Provider Perspective

Our kids have to have their identity and to grow up in society, be a part of society and at the same time not lose their identity.

- Service Provider

The youth of the IAR have become a major concern of many service providers. As one service provider put it, “there are concerns for [Muslim] children being raised in the US and the different morals here.” Though the IAR oversees the recently restructured Youth committee and provides recreational activities for the youth (including basketball and soccer in the community center gym, a yearly camping trip, and an annual “Youth Day”), many service providers were honest about the limited extent to which these services are able to address the challenges that Muslim youth face in American society. Currently, the IAR’s structure refers youths struggling with problems to the Imam, because counseling is not available. As mentioned previously, the Imam, while widely respected for his wisdom and expertise in many matters, may not be

equipped to handle the specific problems of these youth. One service provider suggested, “we should look for an alternative way to address [youth drug problems], like having a psychologist to be clear and talk about issues concerning drugs.”

One of the greatest concerns stems from the influences Muslim youth experience in the public school system. A number of service providers presented a fear that Muslim youth in the public school system are more likely to misbehave, by engaging in activities such as drinking alcohol (forbidden for all Muslims, including adults) and using illegal drugs. One service provider discussed the role of the physical space at the IAR in preventing such behavior: “The purpose of the gym was to help the youth feel comfortable in the Masjid. When youth are pushed out with non-Muslims they may start drinking.” Furthermore, the full-time Islamic school offered by the IAR is not large enough to provide education to high school-age students, forcing them to enter the public school system after the eighth grade.

Several service providers also identified the concern of Muslim youth losing their identity as Muslims while living as Muslim-Americans. One service provider expressed the desire to “redefine the idea of youth in the community...for youth to function as Muslims in the US and face Islamic issues.” Some service providers recognized that some of difficulties facing the youth concern their parents as well. One service provider felt it was most important to address the cultural gap between parents and children involved in the IAR. This interviewee cited past IAR-sponsored workshops that educated parents on what to expect when raising a Muslim child with American cultural influences.

Community Member Perspective

The parents didn't grow up here. They don't know what their kids are facing. Lots of kids' parents don't know what kids are feeling. Or what's going on in their life outside the mosque or outside the community, like drugs and stuff. They won't tell their parents about that.
- Community Member

The community members of the IAR echoed many of the opinions of the service providers regarding the youth of the community. Community members frequently referenced the many activities the IAR provides for the youth, including the gym, youth programs, and Youth Day, while also recognizing the unique challenges Muslim youth face growing up in a non-Muslim society. The community members spoke honestly about IAR youth's struggle maintaining this balance: "They lose their religion. They get confused with the way religion and the way the life is here. The way the culture comes together. They see things at their school, and they don't know what to do."

Because some of the community members were significantly younger than the service providers, we heard opinions and ideas about youth that were previously not expressed. For example, one community member felt that "[the IAR] forgot about the 18-22 year old generation, left to college MSA circles...the mosque is more focused on the children." This sentiment was not heard from any service providers, adding a different perspective on the issue.

Researcher Perspective

They were talking about things that I would have talked about at that age. But there's this added dimension of having to attend public school while wearing hijab, and having to avoid boys, which seems to be a problem in some ways. They talked about how boys would try to get them to talk to them, even though it wasn't right. They also mentioned having people pull up their hijab.

-AOCD Team Member

The team's first visit to the IAR campus occurred on the annual Youth Day. Games and activities for youth of all ages dominated the IAR campus on that afternoon. But even the physical layout of the grounds demonstrates that youth are a high priority in the community—the original Masjid building currently houses the school, a large playground covers a considerable section of the IAR's constrained plot, and the largest space in the new building houses the gymnasium. Every Friday evening, the team witnessed many young people, from toddlers to

teenagers and college students, playing basketball, talking, and eating together in the gym. On several evenings, despite the parking problems due to congestion, large sections of the parking lot were cordoned off for overflow basketball games.

Dr. Abdullah echoed the service providers' perspectives, explaining that in the construction of the newest IAR building, the first and most important aspect was the gym. The gym was intended as a place for young people to congregate and have fun, so they are not tempted by the negative behavior sometimes associated with teenagers. The Youth committee and the Halaka Program (a group discussion of topical issues) organize events, which provide Youth Day, arts and crafts projects, field trips, dinner outings, and other activities observed by the team during various visits to the IAR.

During meetings with high school students and while visiting MSA meetings, team members noted young Muslim-American identities seem to interweave aspects of traditional Muslim society (wearing a hijab, praying, men sitting separately from women) and aspects of Western society (wearing popular styles and talking with members of the opposite sex). Young adults, particularly those who regularly participate in activities planned by the youth committee at the IAR, seemed to feel very deep concern for other young Muslims growing up in a non-Muslim society. Young people mentioned their exposure to the differences between their families' conservative values and typical Western behavior, which they face frequently, especially in public school or university settings. Since the IAR Al-Iman school does not have the capacity to offer high school courses, it is inevitable that young Muslims in the IAR community will encounter these cultural differences.

Forum Action Steps

The Youth discussion groups involved both adults and youth, and led to creative action steps, many of which are concrete and specific. The action steps focused on guiding Muslim youth through their teen years and facilitating better relations between Muslim youth and their parents, who are often foreign-born. There was also an emphasis on fostering an understanding of and love for Islam within Muslim youths.

The brothers decided on the following action steps: identifying problems with the Muslim youth; enhancing relationships and interactions between Muslim youth and their parents; educating parents of Muslim youths about youth issues with guidelines for any problems, suggested in brochure form; having Muslim youth spend time with other Muslims; building strong fundamentals in children; expanding visions for a child's future; giving Muslim youth more of an understanding of their religion; establishing a love for Islam in the youth.

The sisters chose the following action steps: starting a "buddy" program of youth advisors for Muslim youth; having a counseling program for Muslim youth; having trained college-level counselors for high-school level Muslim Student Association members; having workshops on American youth culture for Muslim parents; having more small discussion groups between Muslim youth and their parents; having parent-training groups for Muslims on how to deal with their children; having a program for parents of middle school Muslim children; having workshops for those Muslim youth who are unsure of their religion; having socials to bring Muslim youth to the Masjid or to neutral places; having presentations to promote Muslim awareness at high schools and colleges. The facilitator of the sisters' discussion group will head the Youth committee next year, and she plans to discuss the feasibility of implementing each action step with the committee members.

Theme #4: Volunteerism
**Volunteerism and participation are great strengths of the community,
but demand often exceeds the supply.**

Service Provider Perspective

When your resources are limited, [you depend] on volunteers and in most cases, when you depend on volunteers, you did not [sic] get the results that you wish and hope for.
- Service Provider

One service provider characterized the importance of volunteers for the IAR by saying, “to some extent this Masjid was built on volunteering from day one and it’s still going strong.” Because they constitute 95% of those managing the IAR, volunteers are considered by some to be the greatest asset of the IAR. Service providers (11 of 13 of whom were IAR volunteers themselves) spoke of these volunteers with high regard, recognizing both their commitment and their importance to the functioning of the IAR. Many service providers stressed that volunteering for the IAR was not done for any earthly reward. As one service provider noted, “[the volunteers] volunteer their time and their hearts to Allah.” Services providers also spoke of wanting to give back to the community, and they do so by contributing their time and effort.

Several service providers recognized that despite the importance of the IAR volunteers, the community is still in need of more helpers. Concerns about finding more volunteers had multiple facets. They included improving the participation of everyone involved in the IAR, not just relying on the same volunteers (who tend to be the small core of dues-paying IAR members) for everything. As one service provider noted, “It’s a very strong community, it’s a very strong center but it’s easy to lose it. I think everybody needs to work on it.” Challenges also arise in getting volunteers to give their time on a daily basis, and not just on the weekends. Because the volunteers are unpaid and must maintain external jobs, this is indeed a challenge. Service providers also noted the difficulty in getting sustained and professional help from volunteers:

“one of the challenges really is to make sure you get the professional work done by volunteers you’re not paying nothing [sic], and keep them motivated.”

Lastly, as one service provider mentioned, “the volunteers are running the show.” Though certainly a strength, in that the IAR is built upon the spirit of community members giving back to the community, these volunteers do not always have the professional background that may be required to execute their roles. One service provider was very candid about this issue: “...in general we have a long way to go to get the results that we would hope and would like to see. Because you cannot ask every professional to come in and volunteer their time. We take whoever volunteers to come in and provide their services.”

Community Member Perspective

We have our problems and our downfalls, but we’ll get better. The more people take over responsibility, the more things will get better.

-Community Member

The IAR community members felt similarly to the service providers about the issue of volunteerism within the community, recognizing the IAR’s dependency on volunteerism as both a strength and weakness. One community member said of the core group of volunteers: “Most of the people who work there are not given a salary. It’s hard to find people dedicated to it, with the time it takes...they have to give up time with family. [The] same people run almost everything, designate their life to the mosque.” This sentiment echoes that of service providers, who recognized the need for more and a greater variance of volunteers at the IAR. Similarly to the service providers, some community members mentioned the rewards of volunteering: “We believe in paradise, that we are going to be asked at Judgment Day, so anything that we are doing at the Masjid, I am doing to help and get some reward from God.” Overall, community members

and service providers agreed on the difficulties of finding and keeping an adequate number of volunteers.

Researcher Perspective

The sense of responsibility that these community members have to the center and their fellow community members in need is quite unique and refreshing to see. This was exemplified by the giving to these two charities, as well as the amount of volunteer work the community engages in throughout the center.

-AOCD Team Member

As discussed earlier, because the IAR community is very self-sufficient and does not depend on funds from outside sources, the community runs completely on donations of time and funds from its members and volunteers. The team members saw the same group of people repeatedly, handling many different volunteer positions, including helping the school staff, monitoring the library and interacting in outreach activities, such as the health fair. A handful of people volunteer on several different committees, devoting numerous hours to the IAR community not only volunteering, but attending prayer on a regular basis as well. Some team members noticed that those who volunteer regularly seem to take their tasks very seriously, appearing at the Masjid on almost every occasion the team visited. Some people who pray at the IAR do not volunteer at all, and one team member noted a few familiar faces among a “sea of unfamiliar people” at Jummah prayer.

Four team members attended the Janazah (funeral services) workshop, hosted by Dr. Abdullah, chair of the Cemetery committee. The workshop was designed to train more community members to serve on the Cemetery and Funeral committee, which oversees the Islamic practice of washing, shrouding, and burying a body within 72 hours of death. The team members noted that during the workshop, Dr. Abdullah’s urgings suggested that, although community members had been trained, they did not always follow through with their

commitment to the committee. When called upon for services after a death, some volunteers were unavailable, or had not updated their contact information and could not be reached. Due to the urgency of the Islamic burial preparations, the committee members did not have time to locate the absent members, and instead were forced to turn to those committed members, increasing the burden of those who are always readily available. This example illustrated to the team the need for an increase in not only the number, but in the commitment of those agreeing to serve the IAR community.

Forum Action Steps

The Volunteerism discussion groups were the smallest at the community forum, yet both the sisters' and brothers' groups thought of concrete action steps to help people involved in the IAR become more inclined to volunteer to help the IAR function smoothly. These action steps addressed the lack of an official volunteer committee as well as a convenient way of learning about volunteer opportunities.

The brothers decided upon the following action steps: establishing a volunteer committee to handle recruiting, training, motivation, retention and follow-up, and rewards; formalizing volunteer requirements, including scheduling; formalizing means to communicate, including the IAR website, email, and messaging groups.

The sisters discussed the following action steps: making volunteerism the topic of brothers' and sisters' lessons at the Al-Iman school; making announcements about volunteer opportunities during Friday night lectures; posting volunteer opportunities on the IAR website and on the bulletin board at the Masjid; breaking down volunteer jobs based on what skills are required; improving timeliness by starting and stopping on time. Interestingly, the sisters also brought up as an action step 'volunteering in the community outside of the IAR' as a form of

Da'wah. Although this action step seems out of the context of the theme around which the discussion took place, and is a more appropriate action step for Theme #2, its appearance in this discussion group reflects the importance many IAR members place on Da'wah, and how it plays a significant part in every aspect of their lives.

METHODOLOGY

A variety of research methods were used in the AOCD of the IAR community, including the collection of secondary data, field observations (recorded by team members on each visit in the form of field notes), and semi-structured interviews and focus groups with service providers and community members, to inform the themes described in section 3 above.

Secondary Data

Secondary data are information collected from existing sources, such as population surveys and newspapers. This AOCD used sources that were identified by research and suggestions offered by the team's preceptor and by service providers, including information from the IAR website, IAR-published documents, local newspaper articles, U.S. Census data, and reference books. These data were used to help inform the "outsider's" conceptualization of the community and to inform the team's initial definition of the community. [See Appendix C].

Limitations of Secondary Data Collection

A major limitation in the collection of secondary data was a lack of population level data tied to religious affiliation. Specifically, Public Law 94-521 prohibits the United States government from asking a mandatory question on religious affiliation and no question on the US census form collected information about religion.¹³ This, in addition to the geographic dispersion of the IAR community, limited the usefulness of census data (census data does not include information regarding nation of origin or language spoken in the home).

The IAR collects demographic information on approximately 300 members who pay dues to the IAR organization. There is no formal data available regarding the demographics of those who attend the center for services, such as prayer, school, classes, or facilities uses. Access to the information collected by the IAR is restricted, out of concerns of privacy for those members. Due to these constraints, collection of secondary data was restricted to the public documents listed above, which are limited in their specificity to this particular population, especially the population-level data related to immigration, employment, economic issues, health status and services, vital statistics, and general demographics.

Primary Data

Primary data are information collected from community members and service providers, or through field observations. Primary data serve to triangulate information collected through secondary data sources, to add depth of meaning to the cultural context of the community, and to serve as a source of information where little or no secondary data exist. Primary data included team transcripts obtained through semi-structured interviews with 13 individual service providers and 4 individual community members, and 4 community member focus groups (with 5, 5, 4, and 7 participants, respectively), for a total of formal contacts with 38 individuals. Team members' field observations were recorded in written field notes by each team member after attending community events [see Appendix J and Appendix K].

Collection of primary data consisted of five stages: gaining entrée, interview guide development, participant recruitment, the interview process, and analysis of primary data.

Gaining Entrée

Under the guidance of our community preceptor, the team conducted a two-hour “windshield tour” of the community, which included a walking tour of the IAR campus, an

abbreviated Da'wah presentation, and an introduction to several influential community members. A second windshield tour was subsequently conducted, which included a driving tour of the area surrounding the IAR and visits with several service providers and community members. The two windshield tours served to orient the team to the physical layout of the community, to understand the historical context, and to learn about social and cultural norms of the IAR community. The process of gaining entrée continued with regular visits to the community including, but not limited to: attending prayer services, Jummah, and Friday evening programs; attending UNC MSA meetings; a tour of Al-Furqan Sunday school; attending several Iftars and Eid celebrations during Ramadan; and participating in various women's and youth group activities.

Interview Guide Development

The team developed four semi-structured interview guides for community member and service provider interviews and focus groups [see Appendix A]. The guides contained questions regarding the strengths, challenges, and goals of the community, as well as probes to allow for further exploration of a particular topic. The guides were pre-tested with Dr. Abdullah in order to assess flow, relevance, and cultural sensitivity. The interview guide enabled the team to maintain continuity of the topics covered in each interview, and prevented interviewer bias.

To obtain informed consent, fact sheets were developed, which included information about the interview process, the rights and risks of the interviewee, the role of the interviewer, and the confidentiality of data obtained. Consent forms were signed by each participant prior to their participation in either focus groups or individual interviews [see Appendix A]. The development of interview materials was based on templates created from past AOCD documents. All materials were submitted to and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the School of Public Health [see Appendix E].

Participant Recruitment

Dr. Abdullah served as the team's initial contact to all community members and service providers and helped to compile a list of service providers and key community informants who have extensive ties within the IAR and can reflect upon broad community opinion. He obtained their permission to be contacted via email or telephone by a member of the team in order to schedule an interview [see Appendix F]. Additionally, several community members approached team members with an interest in participating in the project and were subsequently contacted by the team to schedule an interview. As additional service providers were identified through the interview process, they were contacted by Dr. Abdullah to obtain permission for the team to schedule an interview. Interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient for the participant, with the majority of participants choosing to be interviewed at the IAR.

The Interview Process

A total of 4 community member interviews and 13 service provider interviews were conducted, as well as 4 community member focus groups, totaling 38 individuals [see Appendix B]. Interviews lasted between 20 and 90 minutes, and typically took place in the IAR school building. At least two team members were involved in each interview, with one serving as the interviewer, and one or two as note taker(s). The role of the note taker was to record verbal and non-verbal language of the participant. Each interview began with an introduction of the participating team members, the purpose of the interview, and the rights of the interviewee. Participants were asked to read the fact sheet and to sign the consent form if they agreed. Before the interview began, permission was sought to tape record the interview; tape recording began only after verbal consent was given. [Only one service provider refused tape recording]. At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they would like to participate in planning the

community forum. If they agreed, participants were told they would be contacted at a future date to arrange the initial forum planning committee meeting.

To ensure confidentiality, each interview was assigned a number, used to catalogue transcripts and audiotapes. No identifying information was attached to either the tape or the interview notes, and the data were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the UNC School of Public Health when not in use.

Data Coding

Each interview was written to near-transcription level by the note taker based on interview notes and audio recording, if available. After several interviews had been conducted, two team members created a preliminary codebook based on recurring topics in the interviews. They revised this codebook as necessary throughout the process [see Appendix H]. Transcripts were then coded twice by the designated team coders to ensure consistency in the coding process and in the identification of recurring themes. The interviews were then entered into a Microsoft Access database to aid in analysis.

Limitations of Primary Data Collection

While the team gathered much useful primary data, challenges were encountered, including: cultural and language barriers; gaining access to a variety of people across socio-economic status; the community's lack of clarity regarding the AOCD; and the post-September 11th climate, as it affects access to outsiders and the surrounding community.

Within the IAR, men and women do not interact socially, as this is their interpretation of the guidelines of the Qur'an. Therefore, during participant observations the all-female team was limited in its interactions with men. This precluded finding male interviewees outside of the

names provided by the preceptor and those offered by other interviewees. The team would have benefited from being gender-balanced.

The team also faced a language barrier during the collection of primary data. None of the team members spoke languages dominant within the IAR community, such as Arabic or Urdu, so no interviews were conducted with those who do not speak English or who have limited English skills. However, as the team does not know what portion of the community does not speak English, it is unclear how great an effect this limitation presents.

In addition, the team was not able to interview many people who are not regularly involved in IAR activities, such as those who attend solely for prayer on Fridays or only on major holidays, such as Eid. These people may have been newcomers or working-class people who do not have as much time to come to the IAR, and could have offered a very different perspective from those who regularly volunteer and participate at the Masjid, and those of higher socio-economic status.

In addition, Muslims attending the IAR do not have a specific geographic locale. Therefore, it was difficult to identify service providers outside of the IAR. Members of the IAR live and work throughout the Triangle, so there is no set of service providers that community members typically use, and many mentioned simply utilizing service providers within the community. The team spoke with their preceptor and members of the community about contacting state and local agencies. After many discussions, it was decided not to contact agencies such as the State Bureau of Investigation, as it might make the team's role unclear and may create suspicion about the purpose of the AOCD, potentially compromising the ability to gain entrée. This might be related to the post-September 11th climate and the fragile nature of relations with government agencies, in particular law enforcement.

The team was also unable to gain access to people in the surrounding Historic Method community. Though the team identified a few members of the IAR community who do live in Historic Method, they were not able to find specific contacts for potential interviewees. It was later decided that, because many of the strengths and needs identified through primary data collection focused on internal IAR issues, neighborhood residents were beyond the scope of this AOCD project.

Though interviewees read the fact sheets provided by the team, some participants did not fully understand the purpose of the AOCD, or why they were being interviewed. The team explained the purpose, but due to lack of understanding of their roles and intent, as well as the often-stated feeling to educate non-Muslims about Islam, some effects of social desirable responding may have been present when answering questions. Service providers occasionally provided official responses associated with their formal positions at the IAR, and less about their individual perspectives on certain issues. Community members may have thought the team members were there to learn about Islam and thus may have not identified all of the community needs. Although the team believes everyone was truthful, interviewees might not have been as candid as possible. As a result, the identified community needs may be a limited list.

Though the team had a relatively high response rate, approximately 5 people did not return requests for interviews and 1 person turned down the request, possibly due to the lack of clarity in the AOCD purpose. In addition, because the Muslim population in America has been under close watch since September 11th, this may have led to hesitation in speaking to the team, as they are identifiably outsiders and have a high profile affiliation with a state university. People also may have simply been too busy to grant interviews. There is no way to determine the reasons for their lack of response, and no way to determine the effect on the resulting data.

Forum Planning Process

The community forum phase of the AOCD process requires that researchers bring their findings back to the community and present them in a manner most appropriate for that community, and then prompt discussions. These discussions are meant to lead community members to address community needs. The forum represents both the culmination of the team's activities and data collection, while simultaneously giving the community ownership of the team's findings. Therefore, community attendance and participation in the forum is key for success.

The forum planning process began in late January, when the team worked with Dr. Abdullah to select a date and time that would maximize community involvement. It was agreed that Friday night was the most opportune time, because the IAR holds weekly programs and presentations each Friday between the Maghrib and Isha prayers [see Appendix M]. After coordination with the IAR, the team reserved the Friday night program on April 22nd, 2005 for the community forum.

An AOCD community forum is a collaboration between the researchers and the community. Therefore, the team intended for community members and service providers to play an active role in the forum planning process. At the close of each interview, the interviewer asked the interviewee if he or she would like to participate in planning the community forum. Twenty interviewees agreed to help plan the forum, and many more indicated others who might be interested. Six weeks before the forum, two AOCD team members contacted those who had indicated interest in organizing the Forum Planning Committee (FPC). In addition to the two AOCD team members, the team's preceptor, one female service provider, two female community members, and two male community members agreed to participate in the FPC.

The FPC held 3 meetings at Al-Iman school on the campus of the IAR. Meetings occurred weekly on Sunday afternoons during the month prior to the decided forum date, Friday. During the first meeting, logistical tasks, such as securing audiovisual equipment, donations for food, and advertising, were assigned. The second meeting was devoted to discussing the themes to be presented at the forum. The FPC agreed that there would be adequate time, space, and facilitators for eight small discussion groups – four each for brothers and sisters. It was decided that separate gender groups were necessary to ensure cultural sensitivity and the open participation of all interested community members. Therefore, only four themes would be considered during the forum. To choose these four themes, the AOCD team members presented the original seven themes identified through interview coding to the FPC, which narrow the themes from seven to the four that were discussed during the small group sessions at the forum. The FPC based its choice of these four themes on the importance and changeability of each one. After much discussion, the four themes were chosen, and Physical Space was designated an overarching theme to be considered in each small group [For further detail on the chosen themes, see section 3].

The FPC anticipated large numbers of participants, so the team considered several large group empowerment techniques prior to the third FPC meeting. However, due to issues of time and space constraints and the need for separate groups for brothers and sisters, the team ultimately decided to utilize the ORID process for small group discussions [see Appendix I]. The team believed that, even with large numbers of participants, ORID would maximize the time allotted for discussion and be the most efficient route to well-developed action steps. The team developed triggers and ORID questions for each of the four themes to be presented at the third FPC.

The third meeting consisted of a review of each theme's trigger, and an introduction to the ORID technique that would be employed to guide the small group discussions. An AOCD team member explained and demonstrated the ORID technique for the FPC, the members of which participated in the process as the community members would during the forum. Since the team contained no men who could facilitate the ORID process on the brothers' side, it was decided that community members would facilitate the brothers' small groups. In order to be consistent between the sisters' and brothers' groups, the FPC decided that community members facilitate every small group. The FPC selected facilitators for each theme from among themselves, and one AOCD team member was assigned to participate in each of the sisters' small groups. The team contacted a male MSA member, who agreed to act as a facilitator for the brothers' Youth discussion group – the last group without a facilitator from the FPC. All facilitators were trained, and a time was arranged for final questions and a practice session of the facilitation several hours before the forum.

The community convened for the forum, held in the Masjid at the IAR, on Friday, April 22, 2005, between Maghrib and Isha prayers (8:20pm until 10pm). Programs were distributed to participants as they entered the Masjid by volunteers from UNC and several youth volunteers from the IAR [see Appendix D]. The presentation consisted of a welcome by Dr. Abdullah, a presentation given by AOCD team members that included a thorough explanation of the AOCD process, a discussion of the community strengths and needs, and a presentation of the themes, the small group ORID discussions, and report backs on the action steps developed by each of the small groups. The evening concluded with Isha prayer and refreshments donated by local businesses [see Appendix N]. Approximately 250 people attended the introductory presentation and 119 people participated in the small group discussions.

Limitations of Forum and the Forum Planning Process

Time constraints formed a limitation of the forum and the forum planning process. The forum was held between Maghrib and Isha prayers, so the forum needed to be conducted in exactly one hour and forty minutes. The agenda allowed for only 30 minutes of small group discussions and 25 minutes of report backs. Although all small groups were able to create and report back action steps for their themes, the team felt the community would have benefited from additional discussion time, time to assign individuals the responsibility of executing specific action steps in all the groups, and time to compile and compare the brothers' and sisters' action steps. This would have helped to ensure the action steps would be owned by the entire community, rather than divided by gender.

Another limitation of the forum was that "outsider" service providers offering counseling and other social services outside the IAR were not present. At the beginning of the forum planning process, the FPC decided against inviting service providers not directly connected to the IAR, because they felt many of the themes dealt with internal issues, unrelated to the outside perspective. However, social and welfare services developed as an important theme to community members, who frequently mentioned the need for outside connections during the small group discussions. The creation of action steps would have benefited from the participation of external service providers, not typically present in the community.

Although the logistics of maintaining gender separation proved a continual challenge throughout the forum planning process, the AOCD team, with the help of the FPC, was culturally sensitive when planning the forum. The FPC suggested separate brothers' and sisters' small group discussions, so that no community members would feel uncomfortable or unable to participate because of cultural beliefs. For the presentation, the team was prepared to use two

separate projectors to ensure that both brothers and sisters could see clearly, as a divider usually separates the brothers and the sisters in the prayer hall. However, on the night of the forum, the large volume of participants required the removal of the divider, and so only one projector was used. Furthermore, at the last minute, the refreshments for the sisters needed to be moved from the lobby of the Masjid (where brothers would be eating) to the gymnasium, where children and teens were playing basketball. Prior to the forum, the team had discussed last-minute changes that might arise, and came up with contingency plans to ensure a smooth and successful forum.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The AOCD team had a wonderful experience working with the IAR community. Based on the findings of the team, and the results of the community forum, the team concluded that the IAR community is a very capable community, with official members who are responsive to the needs of the community and community members that have a strong sense of identity. During the forum it became apparent to the team that the community had indeed taken ownership of the AOCD's findings, as community members were avidly discussing the themes and assigning each other responsibility for specific action steps. The team's main recommendation to the community as it carries out the action steps created during the forum is to involve as many people who are a part of the IAR as possible, regardless of the extent to which they participate or the frequency with which they attend the IAR. The team's main goal for the IAR is to see many of the action steps, created by community members as well as service providers, carried out. This goal has already started to become a reality; as a member of the Executive Committee and an established leader within the IAR community, Dr. Abdullah has volunteered to ensure the initiation and sustainability of the action steps determined through the AOCD process.

-
- ¹ Yonat Shimron. 2003. "Holy Feast in Anxious Times," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 12 February 2003, B1.
- ² In populations over 5 years old. U.S. Census Bureau. 2005. *American Fact Finder*.
http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en&_ts=
- ³ Islamic Association of Raleigh. 2005. "IAR Brief History,"
http://www.islam1.org/iar/services/archives/2004/12/21/iar_brief_history.php#more
- ⁴ Islamic Association of Raleigh. 2005. "Yearly Progress Report." Raleigh, NC.
- ⁵ Islamic Association of Raleigh. 2005. "IAR brief history,"
http://www.islam1.org/iar/services/archives/2004/12/21/iar_brief_history.php#more
- ⁶ Islamic Association of Raleigh. 2005. "Yearly progress report." Raleigh, NC.
- ⁷ Islamic Association of Raleigh. 2005. "IAR brief history,"
http://www.islam1.org/iar/services/archives/2004/12/21/iar_brief_history.php#more
- ⁸ Islamic Association of Raleigh. 2005. "IAR brief history,"
http://www.islam1.org/iar/services/archives/2004/12/21/iar_brief_history.php#more
- ⁹ Islamic Association of Raleigh. 2005. "Yearly progress report." Raleigh, NC.
- ¹⁰ Linda Simmons Henry and Linda Harris Edmiston. 1993. *Culture town: life in Raleigh's African American communities*. Raleigh NC: Raleigh Historic Districts Commission Inc.
- ¹¹ Sarah Lindnfeld Hall. 2003. "Mosque expansion supported" Raleigh NC: News and Observer 12 June 2003, B3.
- ¹² Yonat Shimron and Sarah Lindenfield Hall. 2003. "Growing by Faith," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 July 2003, A1.
- ¹³ US Census Bureau