

Interview Summary: Community Perspectives

Prepared for: Australian Iranian Society of Victoria Strategic Planning Project

March 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
PURPOSE.....	3
METHOD.....	3
THEMES FROM THE INTERVIEWS	5
INTERVIEW RESULTS	6
<i>Q1: What is working well?.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Q2: What are the barriers? What is getting in the way? (top 5).....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Q3: what would you like to see happening 5 years from now in 2027?</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Q4: anything further to add about what to stop, start of change?</i>	<i>12</i>



INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

This report summarises the key themes from interviews undertaken by MosaicLab during February & March 2022 on behalf of **Australian Iranian Society of Victoria (AISOV)**. Participants included people from a range of backgrounds...

The purpose of the consultation was to gain insight from participants into their current views on AISOV and their ideas for potential future focus. The AISOV board will use their input to guide us as we determine our vision for the coming 5 years and to decide upon what our main priorities are and actions we will take to realise the vision.

This summary is intended to be an information input that, in combination with the AISOV Board members experience, will form a starting point for discussion at the three strategic planning workshops. This report reflects the comments and viewpoints of the participants, who have been de-identified to protect their privacy.

METHOD

Members of the AISOV board provided a range of names and contact details of people to interview, in one case the interview nominee provided an alternative contact name to interview.

Each were invited to participate in 30-minute interviews with a MosaicLab Facilitator. Most interviews were one to one. In total 12 participants took part in the interviews including one responded via email (due to being unwell).

Interview questions:

1. Tell me a bit about what you know about/how you are connected with the Iranian community in Victoria (in our questions this includes a range of people who connect with AISOV including people seeking asylum, Bahai community and Farsi speaking Afghanis)?
2. What do you see is working well for the community in Victoria?
3. What are the barriers, what is getting the way of the community being the best it can be?
4. What changes would you love to see in the community in Victoria, to help us all thrive– what would you like to see happening 5 years from now in 2027?
5. Do you have any advice for AISOV regarding what they are best-placed to support, e.g. one thing they could start doing? One thing they could stop doing? One thing that could be changed?

Common themes were grouped by MosaicLab and are discussed below into 4 sections. Almost all comments are included as examples in the report however some comments with overlap were combined. Comments from interviewees are formatted in *italics*.

Interviewees included those who had arrived in Australia as refugees, skilled migrants and some who were born in Australia. When asked 'how are you connected with the Iranian community?', responses included involvement with groups such as:

- Service providers e.g. AMES, Doorways, Salvation Army
- Youth
- Multicultural Commission
- Past board membership of AISOV
- Baha'i community
- Volunteering in various groups e.g. the Iranian Women's Association

Interviewees were active in a range of areas such as:

- Studying at university
- Doing research into how to engage the Iranian community
- Translation
- Migration support
- Supporting refugees
- Family services
- Mental health counselling
- Spiritual/moral education of children

Themes from the interviews are captured on the following page as a 1-page summary. After that, detail is provided in the 'interview results' section with example comments that were made by interviewees that relate to each theme area. Please note, the most frequently commented theme is number 1 in each table but this is not a representative sample of the community so it is up to the AISOV board during the sensemaking workshops to consider what direction to go in based on what has been said in the interviews.

THEMES FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Q1: WHAT IS WORKING WELL?

1. Running events that support traditional, cultural learning and connection
2. AISOV staying in touch with the community to bring different ideas and approaches
3. AISOV trying to connect with asylum seekers

Q2: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS? WHAT IS GETTING IN THE WAY?

1. Cultural divisions due to perception of political, religious aspects of other cultural aspects
2. Differing views on what AISOV should help with e.g. financial barriers
3. Young people not feeling connected with AISOV
4. Lack of support for Iranians connecting with and integrating into the Australian community
5. Differing views on who AISOV is serving

Q3: WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPENING 5 YEARS FROM NOW IN 2027?

1. Youth and refugees are actively involved; AISOV supports diversity through varied services and events.
2. New arrivals are supported to integrate into Australian community
3. Consider how AISOV partners (if at all), including referral process and services offered for newer arrivals
4. Help deal with the divide - education and opportunities to get to know people, embrace and showcase diversity. Help Iranians feel more connected.
5. A clear AISOV vision and focus areas so it can be advertised and promoted to help with relationship building and trust.

Q4: ANYTHING FURTHER TO ADD ABOUT WHAT TO STOP, START OF CHANGE?

1. May need to review governance
2. Develop guidelines for AISOV communications to ensure inclusive

INTERVIEW RESULTS

Q1: WHAT IS WORKING WELL?

THEME	SUMMARY
<p>1. Running events that support traditional, cultural learning and connection</p>	<p><i>Comments from interviews are in italics</i></p> <p>The most frequently mentioned aspect of AISOV that is working well was events.</p> <p><i>Many events even during Covid. Trying to celebrate traditional days. We are thankful for that.</i></p> <p><i>Celebrating diversity - dates of significance e.g. fire festival. Most are socially included and have a good level of resilience. Good opportunity for AISOV.</i></p> <p><i>Not many organisations have been able to do physical activities so at least they have maintained some of their activities - that is a positive thing.</i></p>
<p>2. AISOV staying in touch with the community to bring different ideas and approaches</p>	<p><i>School support - Iranian / Farsi speaking school link to AISOV, good relationship. Help with connection to culture, writing in Persian etc.</i></p> <p><i>Community support such as churches, Islamic association, NAZAVIC, any local community support</i></p> <p><i>Targeting Iranian / Baha'i and Farsi language speaking community - a bright-minded and well-established and well-educated community. A good opportunity to work with a community like this.</i></p> <p><i>AISOV is surviving the Covid years and staying in touch with members and community through social media - that is valuable and not easy to do these days - keeping the spirit up.</i></p>
<p>3. AISOV trying to connect with asylum seekers</p>	<p><i>AISOV trying to connect with the asylum seekers to older people in the community - to reduce the gap between new and older arrivals.</i></p> <p><i>Doing a little bit more with refugees.</i></p> <p><i>When there were lots of Iranian refugees communities started e.g. Circle of Hope, some applied to be members of AISOV. CoH tried to help Iranians with volunteers to support refugees. Did lots of good work. There is some collaboration between the two groups.</i></p>
<p>4. Other</p>	<p><i>More broadly - the fact that AISOV is considered by the Government as an official voice of the Iranian community - that is important. A lot of people have done a great job to establish that as a voice of the majority of the Iranian community.</i></p> <p><i>From a Baha'i perspective we view community as everyone in the community. We want to shift our focus to being world citizens, while our identity is linked with our cultural heritage ... building communities is about what we all bring and how we can use this diversity to strengthen our capacity. We can see this working within cross-cultural groups including marriages between Persian and non-Persian individuals and how this contributes to culturally rich families.</i></p> <p><i>The formal sustainability and endurance of the organisation through these 30 years.</i></p> <p><i>Admirable that AISOV are doing this project.</i></p>



Q2: WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS? WHAT IS GETTING IN THE WAY? (TOP 5)

THEME	SUMMARY
<p>1. Cultural divisions due to perception of political, religious aspects of other cultural aspects</p>	<p><i>Comments from interviews are in italics</i></p> <p><i>Fear/hesitation in community due to mistrust of each other's politics. Historically AISOV is linked to / seen as political - maybe people don't realise they are changing.</i></p> <p><i>Culture within organisation with limited diversity of volunteers - higher education... more so an issue at the beginning of AISOV rather than now. But still there is not as much focus on diversity of Iranians as there could be. Newer Iranians who do not fit the mainstream culture of AISOV, may feel hesitant to join.</i></p> <p><i>The title [changed] from ISOV to AISOV to include "Australian" because ... integration is important for migrants to this country.</i></p> <p><i>I feel disconnected, I have had Baha'i friends and we just didn't talk about it [religion/political views].</i></p> <p><i>Even at a concert, can feel the divide - people who came on different visas - but once you get to know people that is what the community is missing.</i></p> <p><i>It is essential to continually focus on being inclusive at all times, it is important that we work together within the community for unity. When misunderstandings or differences do arise, it is important to deal with this with love and kindness to overcome and develop powerful solutions.</i></p>
<p>2. Differing views on what AISOV should help with e.g. financial barriers</p>	<p><i>There were a range of comments about the need to support newer arrivals but there were different views about what this support should be. Some suggested barrier areas for Iranians, particularly newer arrivals:</i></p> <p><i>Accommodation</i> <i>Financial barriers</i> <i>Knowing about rules. e.g. how to apply for renting the house</i> <i>English barrier - creating problems with study and finding a job</i> <i>Not being familiar with their Australian rights specially women</i> <i>Digital literacy amongst aged people and new arrivals</i></p> <p><i>Racism is a barrier amongst the community. Some say it is visible and felt and some say they don't speak English well enough to report racism therefore underreported</i></p> <p><i>When I interviewed the Iranian /Afghan community - the pattern of main barriers - mental health issues. More prominent among refugee and asylum seeker, people with TV or bridging visa, and financial problems.</i></p>
<p>3. Young people not feeling connected with AISOV</p>	<p><i>Biggest issue for young Iranian (and other cultures Chinese, Indian, Latinos) people in Australia is loneliness - result is depression. No other community in Australia helps with loneliness. Not much help for young people to join up and meet each other.</i></p> <p><i>It is old fashioned and follows old fashioned approach. Not a lot of young Iranian people interested in involvement, events are family events and for old people. though I am highly involved in Iranian community - they ignore young Iranian people. I might go once a year to events, no more.</i></p> <p><i>Single young guys not interested to attend any of the events, boring and old fashioned.</i></p>



	<p><i>Disconnection between Iranian people and AISOV - a few years ago there was Aust Iranian Youth Society was very active - that was part of AISOV. The Society got tired of the paperwork and gave up. The connection was lost.</i></p> <p><i>My children who were born here know about AISOV but AISOV doesn't have events or programs for them, my kids cannot relate to them. The 2nd generation have a lot of potential value and willingness to do volunteer work. Why would they work for an org which only services their parents. E.g. presenting cultural programs in English - most don't speak Persian very well, they are shy. They come to Iranian events and speaking in Farsi kids don't understand, the music they play is old style the kids don't connect with it.</i></p>
<p>4. Lack of support for Iranians connecting with and integrating into the Australian community</p>	<p><i>I am a strong believer that the organisation needs to facilitate the integration of the members withing the broader community.</i></p> <p><i>Feeling them more welcomed</i></p> <p><i>Making them to engage well with Australian community</i></p>
<p>5. Differing views on who AISOV is serving</p>	<p><i>Afghan's they are Farsi speaking but not sure they want to be part of it.</i></p> <p><i>When people look at AISOV, people think of Persian news and events.</i></p> <p><i>Bahai community run same event on same day - there is a separation - not sure whether they see themselves as part of the community</i></p>
<p>6. Other</p>	<p><i>A range of other comments were offered that did not clearly fit into a theme:</i></p> <p><i>Almost limited channel of comm to Facebook - not everyone uses it - make use of email and Telegram</i></p> <p><i>5 years ago AISOV started working with Asylum seeker - no one really knows what they are doing</i></p> <p><i>Stress due to recent situation in Afghanistan and worry about family and friends.</i></p> <p><i>Cultural barriers - one example provided - women here find it easier to get employed and can find it easier to get Centrelink support. That can cause some family violence and emotional/physical distress.</i></p> <p><i>There is a lot of competition to run Persian events.</i></p>



Q3: WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPENING 5 YEARS FROM NOW IN 2027?

There were 5 key themes from the interviewee responses.

THEME	SUMMARY
<p>1. Youth and refugees are actively involved; AISOV supports diversity through varied services and events.</p>	<p><i>Comments from interviews are in italics</i></p> <p>There were a range of comments about increasing diversity and often interviews were promoting youth and refugees to be more included so this theme is grouped together.</p> <p><i>Offer workshops for Iranian community - people of different backgrounds welcome, 'refugees welcome'.</i></p> <p><i>Connecting with universities and seeing whether younger Persian people want to be a part of AISOV.</i></p> <p><i>If run a fair, have an asylum seeker stall, a Baha'i stall etc make it educational. Different food to connect people. Share differences between cultures.</i></p> <p><i>Persian New Year - could have a small thing for people who don't have family here or where people can be there for when Persian New Year actually happens. More sweet and intimate.</i></p> <p><i>If events continue e.g. brunch at a park to get people to come together rather than just extravagant events where there is a</i></p> <p><i>Focus on giving the community the opportunity to be listened - we have many talented people who have migrated to Australia who want to give support / to help the community e.g. employment workshop</i></p> <p><i>Have more events if there are enough people and money to do it. More support from government or council to do this.</i></p> <p><i>Events could be run as a collaboration, money less of an issue then.</i></p> <p><i>Organise 2-3 places for support - women's group/ youth. If there is a time during the week and 1 person or a group could sit in the centre and be available for contact - then if the community has a problem or question they can make contact.</i></p> <p><i>Hold events that aren't always focused on celebrations e.g. forums to discuss community concerns, more of a service provision focus e.g. employment, family violence.</i></p> <p><i>My children who were born here know about AISOV but AISOV doesn't have events or programs for them, my kids cannot relate to them. The 2nd generation have a lot of potential value and willingness to do volunteer work. Why would they work for an org which only services their parents. E.g., presenting cultural programs in English - most don't speak Persian very well, they are shy. They come to Iranian events and speaking in Farsi kids don't understand, the music they play is old style the kids don't connect with it. Invite them to consultations and see what they want.</i></p>
<p>2. New arrivals are supported to integrate into</p>	<p><i>Focusing services to early settlers people who have just arrived need jobs, accommodation, living advice - as a community organisation formed to bring the community together to help those who need it. Newcomers need support more than others, doesn't have friends, don't know how to find a job, good school etc and those</i></p>



<p>Australian community</p>	<p><i>services would not be forgotten. When they get settled and know their way around they will put hands up to be volunteers for AISOV.</i></p> <p><i>Farsi-speaking Afghani community to integrate into Australia and Victoria in particular. Most have difficulties in English and how to navigate the system, how to get support to e.g. apply for Medicare, to seek assistance etc.</i></p> <p><i>Develop a welcome package in local languages to help the community to easily navigate the system and services.</i></p> <p><i>Can help new arrivals know about the laws here in Australia. Classes about rules and regulations in Victoria. Give them knowledge. Even people here for 30 years still don't know the rules. Government doesn't support so have to work as a handyman within their community. e.g. job in Persian shop or restaurant to survive. So have trouble to find time to improve English as a skill. â€</i></p> <p><i>Supporting them on trauma-based approach</i></p> <p><i>More focus on engaging with bigger Australian community so Iranians not so isolated - this will help their English etc. A client came here when 35yo, now after 25 years from living in Australian, not learning English because not linked and engaged with Australian community. Provide opportunity to be in the community.</i></p> <p><i>I come across a lot of families who are experiencing dysfunctionality, and this can be due to number of reasons such as cultural differences and the complexity of raising children in a new culture. As we know the family unit is the nucleus of human society... It would be beneficial if there are spaces created for families to come together and explore concepts that helps them to become more functional and cohesive.</i></p>
<p>3. Consider how AISOV partners (if at all), including referral process and services offered for newer arrivals</p>	<p><i>Have a referral process into AISOV - helpful for agencies who can do initial assessment for support. Even if they aren't in a position to accommodate a client, communication can solve the problem. Salvation Army for example have funds to support. AISOV might refer to Salvation Army also.</i></p> <p><i>Linking with other support services Baptcare etc</i></p> <p><i>Area leadership meetings - quarterly - connections to see what people are suffering from. Invite different leaders from different organisations. e.g. who can talk about what is going in community- keep each other informed.</i></p> <p><i>Happy to support and make network available.</i></p> <p><i>More connection with government and AISOV including more government support.</i></p>
<p>4. Help deal with the divide - education and opportunities to get to know people, embrace and showcase diversity. Help Iranians feel</p>	<p><i>The education behind and getting to know people.</i></p> <p><i>Diversity embraced and showcased at events.</i></p> <p><i>Open heart to each other and not judge for belief, religion, organisation, political</i></p> <p><i>Build trust for people who came from Iran from beginning of revolution</i></p> <p><i>People feel more connected to and trusting of AISOV and of each other</i></p>



<p>more connected.</p>	<p><i>Create a bridge between generations of the migrants 1st and 2nd. Usually 2nd generation are lost and have value to the community if they can connect to the community.</i></p> <p><i>I think that all communities are predominantly defined by a collective sense of purpose. This influences the culture and attitudes we promote and the behaviours we cultivate. As a Baha'i, I believe this purpose should be the betterment of the world towards an ever-advancing society. Essential to this purpose is a commitment to the common good, supported by unified and concerted action.</i></p> <p><i>In the Baha'i community this purpose is to raise the capacity in everyone to, 'take charge of their spiritual, social, and intellectual in development so that they come to see themselves as active agents of both their own and their communities' progress'. It is my belief that this purpose will help everyone of the community including all Australian Iranians.</i></p>
<p>5. A clear AISOV vision and focus areas so it can be advertised and promoted to help with relationship building and trust.</p>	<p><i>Transparency - in the context of this organisation - what that would entail. How can we become more transparent. Talk about in a brainstorming session. Break it down.</i></p> <p><i>Greater trust in AISOV.</i></p> <p><i>More transparency in terms of the plans e.g. publicise the engagement with MosaicLab</i></p> <p><i>Make some of the meetings that were public where people could give their feedback like in the past</i></p> <p><i>MosaicLab to offer suggestions as to how to overcome that barrier of cultural mistrust.</i></p>
<p>6. Other</p>	<p><i>Some other comments were offered that did not clearly fit into a theme:</i></p> <p><i>Look at ways to encourage people to volunteer and be clear on the value to them for being involved</i></p>



Q4: ANYTHING FURTHER TO ADD ABOUT WHAT TO STOP, START OF CHANGE?

THEME	SUMMARY
<p>1. May need to review governance</p>	<p><i>Comments from interviews are in italics</i></p> <p><i>Once strategy is finalised, may need to review governance to promote diverse membership on board.</i></p> <p><i>Change the board structure there is too much paper work and old fashioned way of doing things.</i></p> <p><i>Simplify procedure to accept new members.</i></p> <p><i>Once finalise strategy - may be need to restructure according to needs in strategic plan.</i></p> <p><i>Develop KPI's as part of strategic plan.</i></p> <p><i>A name change may help with attracting funding and support - Some Afghan community re-named to include a community name e.g. Afghan Victorian Society changed to Afghan Victorian Community Organisation - to enhance their representation within the community. Not sure to what extent this is applicable to AISOV- something for them to think about.</i></p> <p><i>Finalise 5 year plan and may need more \$ and think about financial sustainability. Expand and enhance level of capacity in terms of submitting grant applications to councils and other funding agencies.</i></p> <p><i>More younger people on the board.</i></p>
<p>2. Develop guidelines for AISOV communications to ensure we are seen as inclusive</p>	<p><i>When promoting things, be conscious of language and labelling to make clear all Iranians are invited. Make it sound inclusive so people don't think they need to be from a certain political group or niche groups.</i></p> <p><i>Develop engagement platform or guideline - because the Iranian community said preferred methods or platform was translated written materials in local languages. Work on production of language material in social media. Also get other organizations to promote translated materials.</i></p>



REPORT PREPARED BY:



mosaicLAB

www.mosaiclab.com.au

PLEASE NOTE:

This report has been prepared by MosaicLab on behalf of and for the exclusive use of **Australian Iranian Society of Victoria**. The sole purpose of this report is to provide a record of the participants comments from the community interviews. In preparing this report, MosaicLab has relied upon the information provided by the participants. The client can choose to share and distribute this report as they see fit. MosaicLab accepts no liability or responsibility whatsoever for or in respect of any use of or reliance upon this report by any third party.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you on this important collaboration. Please contact Jessica Connor Kennedy at Jessica@mosaiclab.com.au for any suggested additions.