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State of Muslim Social Services

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THE STATE OF MUSLIM SOCIAL SERVICES IN AMERICA

A Senior Honors Project
In Partial Fulfillment of
Bachelor of Science with University Honors
in Statistics & Sociology
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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May 2006

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Department of Sociology
Abstract

The purpose of this project was to examine the intersection of the American Muslim community and social services. The area of Muslim social services is a new field, given Muslims' relatively recent arrival in America. Muslims are a distinct group, compared to the rest of the American population, not only in terms of religion, but also with respect to immigration patterns, racial and ethnic backgrounds, educational attainment, and economic status. The American Muslim community has a need for social services in the areas of family and marital counseling, elder care, immigrant and refugee support, psychological and drug counseling, convert support, and charitable programs. These services must be developed for Muslims first, to help themselves and, second, to give back to the communities in which they live. However, there are many barriers (including issues of resources and community reluctance) to overcome before such programs can be established. There are already a number of Muslim social services organizations that offer a variety of programs with varying degrees of success. Given the unique position of Muslims in America, communities seek to have social service programs are recommended to establish masjid based programs, train imams and other community leaders in social service basics, partner with other community organizations, develop a volunteer corps, encourage Muslims to enter social service careers, institute leadership development programs (especially for youth), and seek government assistance.
Table of Contents

I. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

II. The American Muslim Community .............................................................................. 3
   A. Immigration Patterns ............................................................................................... 3
   B. Racial/Ethnic Makeup ............................................................................................ 4
   C. Education ................................................................................................................ 5
   D. Economic Status ..................................................................................................... 6

III. Need for Social Services ............................................................................................ 7
   A. Typical Problems .................................................................................................... 7
   B. Need ........................................................................................................................ 11
   C. Barriers .................................................................................................................. 13

IV. Current Organizations (Case Studies) ...................................................................... 16
   A. Baitul Salaam .......................................................................................................... 16
   B. Inner-City Muslim Action Network ....................................................................... 17
   C. Islamic Social Services of Oregon State ................................................................. 18
   D. UMMA Community Clinic .................................................................................... 19

V. Recommendations ...................................................................................................... 21
   A. Masjid Based Programs ......................................................................................... 21
   B. Imam Training ......................................................................................................... 21
   C. Partnering .............................................................................................................. 22
   D. Volunteer Corps .................................................................................................... 22
   E. Social Service Careers .......................................................................................... 22
   F. Leadership Development ....................................................................................... 23
   G. National Forum ...................................................................................................... 23
   H. Government Assistance ......................................................................................... 23

VI. Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 25

Tables
1. Educational Attainment Comparison ........................................................................ 5
2. Household Income Comparison ............................................................................... 6
Introduction

It is, for the most part, a new experience for Muslims to be a tiny minority. The Muslim diaspora in the West is a relatively recent phenomenon and fledgling Muslim communities in new lands are slowly developing—often through a process of trial and error—institutions to provide the social and spiritual centers for their members.

Purpose
The objective of this paper is to capture and examine the intersection of two rather amorphous subjects: social services and American Muslims. The goal of this examination is to gain a better understanding of the current state of affairs in the area of Muslim social services and to develop specific recommendations for Muslim communities to improve their social service offerings.

Scope
The two topics under consideration (social services and Muslim Americans) are very broad and complicated. They are impossible to fully describe in one paper. The Muslim American experience is varied and complex. There is as much, if not more, variation within the American Muslim community as there is variation between the Muslims and the rest of the American population. It is nearly impossible to describe or generalize about Muslims in America with any degree of certainty because of the sheer diversity of views and backgrounds represented by the community. Muslims are not by any means a monolithic group, making it difficult to fully represent the extent of the variation in the population. Furthermore, "social services" is a term that encompasses a wide variety of activities and can be rather fluid in meaning. It is not easy to address all the possible forms of social service programs.

Assumptions
Given the difficulty in fully exploring the topics at hand, a few simplifying assumptions must be made. For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on Muslims of recent immigrant backgrounds. This narrows the field some and makes it unnecessary to qualify every statement
to accurately represent the complex, often very different, experiences of indigenous Muslims (both African-American and convert). Additionally, the discussion of forms of social services will be limited to a few conventional types. The services mentioned in this paper do not constitute the full array of possible services. Rather, for clarity and simplicity, they are a reduced representation of potential social service offerings. Lastly, in this paper, the word "community" will be used as shorthand for several different types of groups for lack of better term to differentiate between them. It can be argued that communities are the basic units of a society, but they can be represented at a variety of different levels. They can be local Muslim or local Muslim and non-Muslim. Communities can also be on a national level, representing the population of Muslims in America as a whole.

Limitations
The topic of this paper delves into somewhat uncharted waters. As mentioned before, Muslims in America are relatively recent arrivals. Therefore, little academic research has been done on American Muslims and even less has been written about social services within the community. Often reports on the two subjects are dated, contradictory, or incomplete.
The American Muslim Community

Before delving into the intricacies of establishing Muslim social services, the history and characteristics of the American Muslim community must first be understood. The American Muslim community has several distinctive features, aside from the obvious element of religion, which set it apart from the rest of the American population. There is a sizable population of American converts to Islam that is largely African American (which is perhaps due to the continuing legacy of the Nation of Islam). As of late however, converts to Islam in America are white or Hispanic just as often as they are African American. The other major segment of the American Muslim community is the immigrant Muslim population and the descendants of immigrants.

Immigration Patterns
Although there is evidence of Muslims in North America since (or perhaps preceding) Christopher Columbus (Huyghe, 1992), the bulk of the American Muslim population did not arrive until the second half of the 20th century. The first significant group of Muslims to arrive in America was African slaves, but they were unable to maintain their Muslim identity due to the oppressive conditions of slavery. Other groups of Muslims immigrated to America in the late-19th and early 20th century. These early immigrants were mainly Arab men (from the Levant) who came as agricultural workers intending to return home or refugees from the collapsed Ottoman Empire (Smith, 2004). This group has largely assimilated into the mainstream American population, but achieved such milestones as building the first structure exclusively designated as a mosque in America (in Cedar Rapids, Iowa).

Muslim immigration was largely cut off by the Immigration Act of 1924 (also known as the National Origins Act) that limited the number of immigrants from a country to two percent of the population of people from that country already residing in the United States at the time of the
1890 Census (Smith, 2004). This stemmed the immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans and completely barred Asians from entering the country. Essentially, Muslim immigration to the United States was halted until after World War II, when small numbers of Eastern European (from the Balkan states and the Soviet Union) and South Asian Muslims (after the partition of the Indian subcontinent) were allowed to enter (Smith, 2004).

The great bulk of the Muslim immigrant population came to America after the National Origins Act was repealed by the Immigration Act of 1965, which eliminated the quota system and gave preference to relatives of U.S. residents and those with occupational skills needed in America (Smith, 2004). Many of the first generation of Muslim immigrants (especially those from the Indian subcontinent) came to America as students or professionals on temporary visas and later became permanent residents and citizens after 1965 (Fong, 2004, p. 147).

While the Muslims who immigrated to America between the 1960's and mid-1980's tended to be urban and well-educated, more recent immigrants are often not so well placed. Rather than immigrating for professional, political, or educational reasons, many of the newer immigrants are allowed into the United States under the green card lottery program and tend to cluster in large cities (such as New York, Chicago, and Atlanta) to take low-paying service jobs.

**Racial/Ethnic Makeup**

It is difficult to get good estimates of the number of Muslims in America and the characteristics of the Muslim American population largely because the U.S. Census Bureau is prohibited by law from compiling religious data (U.S Census Bureau, 2006). Research done to quantify the Muslim American population has therefore relied on other methods to draw a picture of the racial and ethnic make-up of the group.

The estimates of the number of Muslims in America vary wildly. Daniel Pipes, a noted Islamophobe, cites the American Religious Identification Survey from 2001 in an article for the
New York Post to support the claim that there at 1.8 million Muslims in America (Pipes, 2001). Other estimates have been as high as 12 million. Most scholars and Muslim groups put the number at 6-7 million, based on research and anecdotal estimation. It is estimated that South Asians (mainly from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir) comprise about 25% of the American Muslim population. Arab-Americans account for approximately 23%; African-Americans 14%; Sub-Saharan Africans 10%; Iranians 10%; Turks 6%; other Asians 5%; Balkans 5%. The remaining 5% of the population are mostly Anglo-American, Latino, and Native American converts to Islam. (Nimer, 2002, p. 35)

Education
American Muslims are, as a whole, a highly educated group. A survey conducted by Zogby International in 2004 showed that almost 60% of American Muslims over the age of 18 have at least a bachelor’s degree (Project MAPS, 2004, p. 6). Table 1 compares the educational attainment of Muslim Americans to the general American population over age 18.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>% of American Muslims*</th>
<th>% of United States Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than High School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College/Associates Degree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors degree or higher</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Rounded to the nearest whole percent. (Project Maps, 2004, p. 6; U.S. Census Bureau, 2004, p. 10)

Statistically, Muslim Americans are much more likely to have post-secondary degrees and much less likely to end their education with a high school degree or less. High levels of educational attainment in the American Muslim community are also predictive of other social and economic differences from the American population as a whole.
Economic Status
As indicated by higher levels of educational attainment, the household income statistics of American Muslims show that a distribution that is skewed to the higher end of the spectrum compared to the American population as a whole. Table 2 displays the percent distribution of household incomes in 2004. Almost 70% of Muslim households earn more than $35,000 compared to about 60% of all American households.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>% of American Muslims*</th>
<th>% of United States Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; $15,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,00-$24,999</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000-$34,999</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000-$49,000</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$74,999</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; $75,000</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Rounded to the nearest whole percent.
(Project Maps, 2004, p. 8; U.S. Census Bureau, 2005, p. 38)

As a group, American Muslims are on average financially better off than the American population as a whole.
Need for Social Services

The experience of Muslims in America is significantly different from that of any other (largely immigrant) group, not only in terms of immigration, race, education, and wealth, but more importantly in terms of religious and cultural gaps between Muslims and the people among whom they have chosen to live. These religious and cultural differences are too extensive and varied to be easily summarized. Furthermore, they are not consistent across every group of American Muslims. But clearly, Muslims do not fit into the general, secular social services scheme (public or private) that is currently in place because of their unique religious and cultural characteristics. Providing appropriate social services is a communal obligation—one that needs to begin being fulfilled now in order to build and maintain functional communities that will not fade away over time.

Typical Problems
Many within the Muslim community would like to believe that there is no need for social services for Muslims. They cling to the achievements of Muslims in America thus far (which are unparalleled by any prior immigrant group in rapidity) as proof that Muslim communities, families, and individuals are doing well and have no need of help. They could not be more wrong. The larger the Muslim presence in America grows, the frictions of assimilation or isolation will become increasingly apparent in the community, in the family, and in the health and well being of the individual. The post-September 11th climate, with its growing anti-Muslim sentiment, makes it necessary for Muslims to do everything possible to keep all parts of their communities strong. Additionally, the American Muslim community is changing rapidly and needs direction from within to handle those changes. There are several areas of need now that will only become bigger problems in the future if adequate community services are not put in place now.
Marital/Family

Muslim families are in need of social services such as marital and family counseling. Divorce is seen as a last resort option by Muslims, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the divorce rate of American Muslims is approaching the overall American rate of divorce. The needs of American Muslim couples have to be met through Islamically oriented counseling or therapy.

Furthermore, when divorce becomes the only option, Muslim families need access to support and arbitration services to ease the transition. Pre-marital counseling is a preventive service that is also important for Muslim communities as more and more second and third generation Muslims from immigrant backgrounds reach marriageable age. Conflicting cultural expectations (from families as well as prospective spouses) and Islamic limitations on dating create the need to establish a pressure-free forum in which to resolve possible problems before marriage. A complicated set of issues surrounding arranged and semi-arranged marriages, varying from traditional gender roles to American ideals of romance, needs to be addressed. The issue of spousal abuse must also be recognized and dealt with in the Muslim community. Muslims need to establish safe havens for battered women and children with appropriate support services (housing, job training and placement, childcare, and legal counsel). Additionally, families need access to neutral arbitrators who use an Islamic approach in handling disputes. The myriad pressures on Muslim families call for family services to be provided by the community. Issues of intergenerational or cultural conflict within families are becoming increasingly common and intra-community resources are needed to handle the problem. Battlegrounds such as assimilation and religious adherence, among others, must be carefully handled to help maintain functional Muslim families.
Elderly
The American Muslim community is very young when compared to the American population as a whole, but it is aging as rapidly as the rest of the United States. Until very recently, there were few elderly Muslims (especially among the immigrant population) other than parents and relatives brought to America under family re-unification laws. But now the earliest group of immigrants—those who were in their twenties in the 1960s—are approaching retirement age. Over the next decade or so, the number of retired and elderly Muslims will increase greatly, keeping pace with the increase in retired persons in the American population. Few, if any, provisions have been made for elder care in the Muslim community. Traditionally, the eldest members of society are cared for by the extended family, but such support structures are much weaker in American Muslims communities. First, immigrants are largely cut off from their extended families by virtue of being in a different country. Second, the socio-economic demands and conventions of life in America make multi-generational living arrangements prohibitively difficult. A range of services, from social activities for seniors to in-home care to nursing communities, are needed for aging American Muslims within the next 10 to 15 years.

New Immigrant/Refugee Support
The characteristics of Muslim immigrants to America are changing. No longer are they exclusively educated professionals or students. More and more often, new immigrants are unskilled workers. They have few resources, limited English language skills, and only low-paying service jobs. Refugees are often in a similar situation, regardless of their position in their country of origin. Though these two groups tend to migrate to city centers with large, established communities of the same ethnic origin where most of their needs are met through informal networks, the need for transitional support services still exists, especially for refugees. English classes, job training and placement, housing, and other forms of assistance are critical.
Too often, such services provided by the Muslim community are sporadic and disorganized. Church groups tend to provide far better transitional services than Muslim organizations, especially in smaller urban areas.

**Psychological/Drug Counseling**
Mental illness is often seen as a taboo topic among Muslims, but there is a need to address the issue from within the Muslim community. But, as Aneesah Nadir (2001), the president of the Islamic Social Services Association-USA, notes, there are Muslims in America who suffer from mental illness and have behavioral problems resulting from “depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation, and alcoholism” and they must be helped. The impetus for diagnosis, treatment, and therapy for mental illness needs to come from Muslim organizations. Depression and anxiety disorders among Muslims are a critical issue, especially after 9/11. Drug use is another growing area of concern. As the American Muslim community expands and diversifies, it is no longer isolated from the problems of drugs. Drug awareness and prevention programs are necessary, as are treatment programs.

**Convert Support**
Islam attracts a great number of converts, but the sad reality is that their rates of attrition are also very high. Converts to Islam are in a unique and difficult position, especially after 9/11. Conversion is an intensely personal and emotional decision for most. The transition to a new belief system, new rules of conduct, and a new community are made only more difficult by family and social pressures. To this end, Muslim communities must make a concerted effort to educate and create strong ties with converts, not letting them drift away through neglect.

**Charity**
Most Muslim communities do make an effort to have charitable programs. These efforts are usually financed by zakat (the yearly percentage Muslims are required to donate out of their unused capital). But the charitable work tends to an unsystematic, once a year affair that does
not address the recurrent needs of the community (both Muslim and non-Muslim). Rent and utilities assistance, food pantries, consignment clothing, and subsidized medical, dental, and eye care are all programs that are greatly needed and can be easily provided by Muslim communities. Unlike other areas in social service, such charitable efforts require only dedication and practically no specialized training.

Need

The reasons and motivations for establishing a range of Muslim social service programs in America are many, but fall into two main categories. First, Muslims need social service programs to build and maintain strong communities—in essence, to help themselves. Second, Muslims need to develop social service programs to help others and contribute to the towns and cities in which they live. Thus, Muslim communities must develop and offer a full range of social services, from family counseling to rent assistance, to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Islam has a strong ethos of helping one’s neighbor, aiding the less fortunate, and giving to those who ask. Muslims in America have an obligation to carry on this legacy, though it may be informs previously unseen in the history of Islam.

Returning to the first category of reasons why Muslims need to establish social service programs—Muslims helping themselves—the fact that there is an increasing demand for social services tailored to meet the needs of Muslims has to be acknowledged. There are many factors that account for this increasing demand, not the least of which is the simple growth in the size of the American Muslim population. In a span of about forty years, Muslims in America have gone from being a negligible minority to several million strong today. As more and more people join the American Muslim community (whether through immigration or conversion or as a result of natural population growth), the greater the need for Muslim-specific social service programs grows.
One might ask why American Muslims need to develop their own social service programs. The scheme of social services already in place often does not fulfill the needs of Muslims. Muslims in America are distant, in a cultural and religious sense, from the modes of social service delivery used by the rest of the population. Most Muslims would not feel comfortable discussing their marital woes with a counselor who does not have a good understanding of their religious or cultural background and most Muslims would not be happy putting their elderly parents into nursing homes that do not acknowledge and make accommodation for religious concerns. The need for Islamically oriented social service programs is in large part due to the social distance between Muslims and the mainstream. This is not to say that Muslims are outside of the normal realm of American society, but rather to recognize the unique qualities and characteristics of the American Muslim community that make it difficult for Muslims to effectively utilize the scheme of secular social services. The American Muslim community has a special set of issues that are best understood and handled within the community.

One might also ask why Muslims in America have need of social services in forms relatively unknown in historically majority Muslim lands. Most of the same services are offered in Muslim countries in different forms that vary greatly from culture to culture. However, one form of social service delivery seems to be present in most Muslim societies and that is the extended family. Family and marital disputes are often arbitrated by relatives and elders are supported and cared for by the younger generations. Many forms of charitable social services are also handled by family structures. Often, wealthy families will endow schools in their ancestral villages, foster needy relatives, and patronize the neighborhood poor (with food and clothing). Other forms of social services, like the Zawiyas of North Africa and the Lungers of Asia (both food and shelter spots), have been developed over many hundreds of years. But Muslims in America
are not a traditional society and the traditional social service mechanisms are not easily transported to new lands. Immigrant Muslims often do not have the support network provided by the extended family because they are separated from their families and because life in America is not particularly conducive to multi-generational living arrangements that are prevalent in the Muslim world. Muslims are a relatively new community in the United States—one that has not had the time to develop social services, formal or informal. But the need for social services exists, regardless of the community’s capacity to fulfill those demands. Institutionalizing the system of social services is necessary for the maintenance of healthy and functional communities because the development of informal mechanisms of social service is too slow to meet the great present needs of the Muslim American community.

Not only do social services need to be developed to help Muslims, social services need to be developed in order for Muslims to contribute to the places in which they live. This has only become more imperative in recent years, after the 9/11 attacks, as Muslims must show with actions, not just words, that they do not believe in or endorse the violent actions perpetrated by a few in the name of Islam. Furthermore, the Islamic traditions of charity and kindness demand that American Muslims—who are, on average, financially better off than most Americans—aid their neighbors. So any social service program Muslims in America establish ought to have an open door policy and be willing to serve all people to the maximum possible extent. Muslims need to establish or at least participate in (through volunteer work) social service programs that benefit the greater community.

Barriers

Though there is great need for social services in the Muslim community, the barriers to establishing such programs are also considerable. The biggest challenges are very often practical in nature—having to do with resources and the lack thereof. But the challenges presented by
community resistance to social service programs may be just as daunting. Of course, almost no Muslim would object to charitable social service programs, but many may not like the idea of programs such as counseling services for a variety of reasons.

The resistance to some forms of social service can come in several kinds. First, as mentioned before, there are those in the Muslim community who would deny that there is a need for social services. They see Muslim family life as basically “safe and sound”—a misperception by most expert accounts (Mujahid, 2001). Second, Muslims may oppose certain social service programs as too intrusive. Islam has a strong ethos of keeping private matters private (by severely discouraging gossip, among other practices) and, to many, counseling services—in which a client tells all to an uninvolved third party—seem to violate that principle. The idea that confidentiality is the cornerstone of any ethical counseling service is either ignored or forgotten by Muslims who would resist social service programs on the grounds of privacy. The third group of people who might resist social service programs may have much more complex motivations. Their resistance can be fueled by their unfamiliarity with social service programs or a belief that providing social services is not obligatory upon the American Muslim community. Others may see some programs as a challenge to traditional authority that might upset family order. Still others may be skeptical of the effectiveness of social service programs. The various objections of members of the Muslim community are not the only barrier to establishing Islamic social service programs. There are many practical hurdles to consider, but the biggest barriers are basically issues of dealing with the lack of resources. Outside large urban centers with great numbers of Muslims, most communities are still in the process of establishing basic institutions, such as masjids and schools, and do not have the money or leadership talents left over to create social service programs. In many communities, all the
financial and human resources are consumed by projects that are the foundation of the community. Building and maintaining basic community institutions may leave little in the way of resources for establishing social service programs. This lack of resources, coupled with resistance from Muslims, can be a formidable barrier to instituting formal social service programs. However, the barriers to social service programs are not limited to the lack of money, space, leadership and support. In most communities, there is a lack of qualified professionals (and volunteers) to actually run many of the programs. There simply are not many American Muslims who are trained in the area of social work (or related fields). Though specialized training is not necessary to run charitable programs or convert support groups, it is absolutely critical to other programs like marital/family counseling and elder care.

The barriers to creating social service programs are not insurmountable, as evidenced by the growing number of successful Muslim institutions in America. The barriers make it more difficult to start such programs, but with leadership, training, and demonstrable need, social service programs will eventually flourish. In the meantime, other measures must be taken to fill the gap. There are many things that can be done, but first an overview of programs currently in place is in order.
Current Organizations (Case Studies)

Most Muslim communities provide some sort of social service programs, but many of the efforts are sporadic and limited in duration and reach. Most often, communities offer charitable services based out of masjids and Islamic centers because they are the easiest to implement and fund. Here are a few examples of organizations that have—with varying degrees of success—developed a number of different types of services.

**Baitul-Salaam Residence for Battered Women and Children**

Baitul-Salaam (Arabic for “house of peace”) is a shelter for abused, abandoned, and homeless women and children in the greater-Atlanta area. The organization was founded in 1997 by four Muslim women. They started by organizing informative events about the problems of domestic violence and opened a shelter in November of 1999. Currently, the shelter is located in a house in Clayton County (a suburban area). Baitul-Salaam can house up to 16 women and children at a time. Since the shelter was opened, it has housed more than 450 women and children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds from across the United States. The services offered by Baitul-Salaam are not limited to Muslim women only. (Baitul Salaam, Inc., n.d., About Us)

Baitul-Salaam has raised anywhere from $50,000 to $90,000 per year (since 1999) through a variety of means. The organization does fundraising through Turner Field (the home of the Atlanta Braves) and Chico’s clothing store. They also receive private foundation grants and donations. The shelter currently operates on a $3,600 monthly budget, including $900 in stipends to three people to provide case management, security, and house management. Baitul-Salaam’s goal is to raise $250,000 per year and plans to add a 24/7 abuse hotline, 4 full-time staff, and 2 part-time workers. (Baitul Salaam, Inc., n.d., Shelter)
Inner-City Muslim Action Network
The Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN) is an organization that seeks to serve the community (both Muslim and non-Muslim) in south and southwest Chicago. IMAN has 2 full-time and 6 part-time staff in two locations. IMAN categorizes its services into 3 areas: awareness and outreach, networking and organizing, and social services.

Awareness and Outreach
The programs conducted in the area of awareness and outreach are intended to provide opportunities for Muslims and those interested in Islam to learn and grow spiritually through workshops and seminars. IMAN conducts a “Jail Outreach” program in the Cook County jail system that provides information to prisoners interested in Islam, helps organize services for Muslims, and participates in pre-release transitional services. Other programs under the banner of awareness and outreach include innovative youth Islamic education courses, workshops on subjects like cultural sensitivity for government agencies, and seminars with prominent American Muslim scholars. (Inner-City Muslim Action Network [IMAN], n.d., Awareness and outreach)

Networking and Organizing
IMAN hosts a variety of creative projects, from graffiti writing to spoken word poetry. Each month, IMAN holds a “Community Café” performance for writers, poets, emcees, essayists, and other artists in area coffee shops. Other activities in the area of networking and organizing include campaigns to aid day laborers and expunge the records of certain ex-offenders. IMAN also works to build networks and coalitions with other area organizations. IMAN is perhaps best known for its “Takin’ It to the Streets” festival, which is held every other year in Marquette Park. The daylong festival brings thousands of people together to enjoy musical performances, sports tournaments, and carnivals, in addition to health and legal clinics and community workshops. (IMAN, n.d., Networking and organizing)
**Social Services**

IMAN's social services projects take a three pronged approach to helping the community. The organization runs a food pantry that is open every Sunday morning, with delivery and appointments available. The food pantry also offers nutritional education and referrals to other community organizations to meet the participants' other needs. IMAN offers health services in the form of a bi-weekly clinic run out of a local doctor's office. The clinic is staffed by several volunteer physicians and medical students. The clinic screens for problems such as diabetes and high cholesterol in addition to regular medical care and preventive services (including immunizations, yearly physical examinations, and health education). The food pantry and the clinic are intended to meet the basic needs of the participants, while the third part of the plan is career development designed to help the participants become self-sufficient. The IMAN Career Development Initiative (ICDI) started with a program teaching computer repair, but has now expanded to include GED classes and basic computer literacy in addition to special computer certifications. The computer classes are taught by volunteers from the industry and GED courses are taught by college students. (IMAN, n.d., *Social services*)

**Islamic Social Services of Oregon State**

Islamic Social Services of Oregon State (I-SOS) was founded in 2003 in the greater Portland area to serve Oregon and southwest Washington State. The organization mainly works in 4 areas: refugee services, needy assistance, family crisis, and alliance support. Under refugee services, the organization's original mission, I-SOS sponsors and supports refugees until they become self-sufficient. The organization has also branched into providing monetary support in the form of rent, utilities, and food assistance to needy families that have suffered some sort of disruption. I-SOS's work in family crisis is mainly to serve as arbitrators and facilitators during family separations or disputes and death. I-SOS conducts networking activities with other
organizations (social service and community groups and masjids) to better connect resources and services to those who need them under the banner of alliance support. The organization is run entirely by a volunteer staff and all of its funding comes from the local community. It granted 416 requests (or cases) on a budget of about $160,000 in 2004. Adults between the ages of 20 and 40 comprise the greater part of I-SOS's clientele, but it is concentrating on extending services to youth and elderly clients. (Islamic Social Services of Oregon State [ISOS], n.d., About I-SOS; ISOS, n.d., Services)

UMMA Community Clinic
The mission of the University Muslim Medical Association (UMMA) Community Clinic in South-Central Los Angeles is "to promote the well-being of the underserved by providing access to high quality healthcare for all, regardless of ability to pay." UMMA was founded as a vehicle for Muslims (and others) to provide community service to the public by graduate and medical students at the University of California, Los Angeles and Charles R. Drew University. The clinic has been operational since 1996 and provides care to one of the poorest and most medically underserved regions in the country. The clients are largely minority, uninsured, and unemployed. The clinic sees approximately 170 patients every week and has served over 10,000 people (25,000 visits). (UMMA, Inc., n.d.)

The clinical services provided by UMMA include adult family medicine clinics, clinics for infants, children, and adolescents, childhood immunizations, semi-annual health fairs, HIV testing, specialty clinics (ophthalmology, gynecology, dermatology, teens), a full range of on-site laboratory tests, and direct referrals to county medical facilities. Patient education and life-style modification are also part of UMMA's care program. Beyond everyday clinical care, UMMA also hosts tax clinics, clothing and toy drives, and immunization days. The clinic hopes to offer tutoring for area children in the future. The UMMA clinic is run by a combination of staff and
volunteer workers. It’s funding comes in part from individual donations, but also from local and federal government agencies, area medical facilities, and corporate or private foundation partners. (UMMA, Inc., n.d.)
Recommendations

Not all communities can establish and sustain programs on a scale similar to the organizations described in the cases studies above. Most Muslim communities do not have the resources—monetary or human—to launch and maintain such extensive projects. However, there are a few steps that almost every Muslim community can take to improve the state of Muslim social services in America and meet its obligation to provide appropriate services to its members. The following recommendations are both short- and long-term strategies that can be adjusted to suit a community’s particular needs and available resources.

Masjid Based Programs
Rather than establishing free-standing, independent social service programs, it is often easier to associate with a masjid or Islamic center. The benefits of working with or through another organization are numerous. First, many of the preliminary steps necessary for forming an organization (registering of tax-exempt status, submitting bylaws, etc.) can be omitted because the institutional foundation will have already been established by the masjid or Islamic center. Second, the masjid or Islamic center can provide existing space, staff resources, and possibly funding for social service programs, even if on a limited basis. Third, working with an Islamic center or masjid provides existing clientele and support bases. The community that utilizes the masjid can also utilize and/or support social service programs associated with the organization. Essentially, working with an organization that is already established and recognized in the area lowers the start-up hurdles for new social service programs.

Imam Training
Training imams (prayer leaders) to handle family and marriage counseling programs is a good option for communities that cannot afford to pay an additional staff member. Imams are usually in a position of authority and respect and are therefore the logical starting point for family social
services. Many imams already devote much of their time to counseling community members and it is in the best interests of the community to make sure the Imam has adequate training and support to fulfill those duties. Muslim communities should also consider training female leaders in counseling and the like. Several national and regional Muslim organizations, including the Islamic Society of North America, the Islamic Circle of North America, and the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California, offer training to imams in counseling and conflict resolution, among other topics.

**Partnering**

For services that Muslim communities cannot provide themselves, it is useful to partner with likeminded community organizations. Developing ties to area charitable and family service groups and then referring cases to those groups is one way to fulfill the social service needs of local Muslims. In return for aid from other social service organizations, Muslim communities should reciprocate with support, both monetary and human.

**Volunteer Corps**

Building a group of committed volunteers from the local Muslim community is another way to get Muslims involved in social services offered by either the Muslim community itself or other organizations. This is a good way to reciprocate for the aid received from partner organizations. Volunteering regularly is an opportunity to learn about operation of social service programs as well as an opportunity to build support networks and to contribute to the community.

**Social Service Careers**

A long-term strategy for improving the delivery of Muslim social services is to encourage Muslims to enter into careers in the field. It is important for American Muslims to be represented in all areas, not just in fields traditionally favored by immigrant Muslims (such as medicine or engineering). This can be done in a variety of ways at the community level: by holding career fairs for youth, offering opportunities to shadow social service professionals, or
volunteering at social service organizations. If Muslims are to provide social services for their own communities, it is highly imperative for Muslims to also provide their own trained social service professionals.

**Leadership Development**
Related to the need for programs to encourage Muslims to enter social service careers, there is a corresponding need to formally train Muslims to hold leadership positions (both within Islamic social service organizations and other community institutions). Training American Muslim youth is especially critical. The Muslim community of the future has to have the skills and expertise to maintain and expand the organizations established now.

**National Forum**
If Muslim social services are to flourish nationwide, there needs to be dialogue about social issues facing the Muslim community at a national level. Currently, several organizations host conferences and publish journals (or policy papers) about Muslim social services. For example, the Islamic Social Services Association-USA holds an annual conference for “social workers, counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, mental health professionals, volunteers, students, imams and other religious leaders” (n.d.). But the efforts by various organizations are disparate and do not constitute a comprehensive national dialogue. A nation-wide coordinating council, that brings together the different regional and national groups, needs to be established to host academic and practical discussion about social services issues in the Muslim community. A national forum to address Muslim social services and develop policy will provide clear objectives and direction to local-level social service initiatives.

**Government Assistance**
Finally, Muslim organizations can look to the American government as a resource. Grants from the government are available at the local, state, and national level. For example, President George W. Bush’s Faith Based and Community Initiatives program is a source of funding for
groups seeking to provide a variety of grassroots services. Grants are available through a number of federal agencies, including the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (White House, n.d.).
Conclusion

Clearly, American Muslims have a long way to go before they meet the social service needs and obligations incumbent on the community. This is not an unexpected conclusion, given Muslims American community’s relative youth. But it is of the utmost importance for the community to realize that social services, offered by Muslims for Muslims and others, are essential to building strong communities that will not fade away over the passage of time. Providing social services, in a variety of forms, is a communal obligation that cannot be ignored. Muslims must, under the aegis of their local masjids or Islamic centers, begin to lay the foundations for comprehensive social service programs now, so as not to be overwhelmed by the community’s needs as it grows.
Works Cited


