

The Inner Circle

Annual Report 2013 – 2014

It is indeed a great pleasure to present The Inner Circle Annual Report for the period 2013 – 2014. Our Annual Report provides a glimpse into the lives of queer Muslims and our struggle for acceptance and love, of the strategic alliances we have entered into, our donors, of the actions we implemented, our achievements, impacts created, lessons learned and challenges we continue to face. 2014 represents the first year of implementing the 5 year strategic plan of The Inner Circle. We have had to both implement our vision and simultaneously create a safe space for reflection and introspection. The passion and energy of our staff, volunteers, donors, board members and indeed our beneficiaries has been harnessed in this period in a collective effort to bring about change in our social landscape.

The Inner Circle is honoured by the growing demand for our professional services and being regarded as a resource and knowledge base for all our stakeholders. We have witnessed that an increasing amount of straight Muslims are coming to The Inner Circle for counselling, to attend our training programs and even make use of the interfaith marriage services we conduct. I have been accepted as a marriage officer and in 2015 all same sex and interfaith marriages conducted by The Inner Circle will be legal in terms of South African Law!

The Inner Circle takes is committed to accountability and transparency and board members play an important role in oversight and leadership of the organisation. I would therefore like to thank my fellow board members for the support and stewardship of the organisation. I also wish to express, on behalf of fellow board members and the organisation, my sincere thanks to our donor partners, our international partners in the Global Queer Muslim Network, our feminist allies, the Forum for Religious Leaders and indeed our beneficiaries, for trusting us to be the voice of the voiceless.

And finally, I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to the staff and volunteers of The Inner Circle for their dedication in realizing the vision and mission of the organisation – your love for the organisation does not go unnoticed!

Peace and Love



Muhsin HendricksThe year in context

The year 2014 marks the first year of the implementation of our 5 year strategic plan. Through our work we create a safe space for practices and processes that are transformative, creative, and inclusive and that give voice to those who are excluded from the mainstream. In 2014, we are faced with a political context that is very worrying.

Context:

To say that Islam is in a state of crisis would be an understatement. Civil war in Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the unfolding Arab Spring has been rolled back largely in Egypt and undemocratic and military regimes dominate the Middle East. The rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq is reflective of a reactionary interpretation of Islam that borders on fascism, to the extent that the Islamic State routinely kills 'moderate Muslims' and beheads nuns and priests. All of this has been accompanied by a rise in Islamophobia in the West and many Muslims feel as if they are under siege. The Inner Circle counters this 'endangered narrative' with a narrative of promoting love and acceptance and diversity, of inclusivity as opposed to rejection and creating and promoting safe spaces for the celebration of diversity and voices of reason, compassion and mercy. This Annual report will therefore focus on the impact we have created in the lives of individual queer Muslims, but also very importantly, the impact we created in raising awareness at a global level within an organizational context. This impact is of great importance as it is related to our objective of building a global network of queer Muslim organizations with the support of our allies in the feminist movement, the interfaith movement, the Forum for Religious Leaders and of course our donors.

The Inner Circle is happy to report on our progress in the following areas of our operations:

- Staff Training & Capacity Building
- Developing the IPEP PowerPoint that accompanies the IPEP Participant Guide
- Developing the IPEP Facilitator Guide
- Implementation of the IPEP for 6 local participants
- Revising the 'On becoming you Participant Guide for the Second Edition
- Developing the 'On becoming you' Facilitator Guide
- Implementation of the 'On becoming you' workshop
- Research and content development for the Training of Trainer Guides
- Implementation of the Training of Trainer Program for 6 international participants

Staff Training & Capacity Building



Imam Muhsin Hendricks conducted a Stakeholder Client Care workshop – 24 Feb 2014 attended by: Programs Manager, Researcher, Reception, Media & Marketing Officer, Office Administrator, General Assistant conducted by Muhsin Hendricks. Follow up training was conducted on 04 Mar 2014 attended by: Researcher, Reception, Media & Marketing Officer, Office Administrator, General

Assistant conducted by Muhsin Hendricks.

All frontline staff attended a Project Management Course – 12-14 May 2014, attended by: Researcher, Reception, Media & Marketing Officer, Office Administrator conducted by Trevor Ketler of Ketler Presentations.

Impact for staff and TIC

During the month of November 2014, TIC conducted a performance appraisal process of frontline staff facilitated by Sonia Boltman, external Human Resources practitioner. The TIC staff all scored well, proof that staff are committed and efficient in carrying out the tasks assigned to them. Training needs were identified such as graphic design, filming and finance skills related to calculating tax etc. These needs will be costed, appropriate training institutions identified and training will take place in 2015 if adequate funds are secured.

International Personal Empowerment Program

(IPEP)

IPEP PowerPoint Slides

The IPEP PowerPoint slides are needed to facilitate enhanced learning through visuals. All diagrams used in the manual are explained utilizing the PowerPoint slides. The task was completed and the revised IPEP manual is now used in IPEP training.



IPEP facilitator Guide

Notes and evaluations of previous IPEP training sessions were added to the current facilitator guide. An electronic copy is available. A final edit will take place in December 2014 before we can print hardcopies for 2015.

IPEP Implementation

The first IPEP workshop took place 13/03 2014 and ended 03/07/2014. 6 Participants signed up and 5 completed the training

The second IPEP workshop took place 05/07/2014 and ended 21/08/2014. 6 Participants signed up and 5 completed the training

The third and final IPEP for 2014 started on 11/10/2014 and will end 30 December 2014

Impact for IPEP participants

- Participants were able to reconcile their sexual identity and faith and now have a renewed sense of spiritual identity
- Able to deal with guilt and shame
- Living integrated lives
- Improvement in self esteem
- Coming out

There is an integral link between the Psycho-Spiritual support TIC offers and the training we offer.

Psycho – Spiritual Support

In May, The Inner Circle appointed an Education, Training and Wellness Officer (qualified social worker) to assist the Executive Director with individual queer Muslims who approach The Inner Circle for support. To date 21 counselling sessions were conducted for 2014. It is important to note that this service is critical as clients include those who suffer extreme depression to the point of attempting to commit suicide! This counselling process is long term in nature and clients are assisted to reconcile their faith and sexuality.

Impact for beneficiaries

- 7 clients who were previously in heterosexual relationships came out to their partners and now live authentic lives true to their sexual orientation.
- 10 clients came out to their families.
- 8 clients in total presented with depression and was assisted with coping mechanisms
- 4 clients presented with suicidal thoughts
- 1 client attempted suicide and was hospitalized. This client was assisted to come out to his parents during an intervention with the family. The parents now accept the sexual orientation of their son
- **5 clients signed up for the International Personal Empowerment Program**
- All clients are encouraged to sign up to our training programs, however, not all are ready to take the next step in the reconciling process.

7 Same sex and Interfaith Marriages were conducted during this period. All our clients who wish to get married have to attend two counselling session prior to getting married. This service is critical as it provides a space for individuals to have their weddings conducted according to Islamic rites. For obvious reasons, this service remains unavailable to queer Muslims and those who marry outside their faith. The Inner Circle remains the only faith based organization in South Africa to offer this service.

“On Becoming YOU”

In May 2014 the Researcher completed the citations for the OBY workbook. Editing of OBY workbook was completed by the Education and Training Officer in August 2014.

Impact for beneficiaries

The 6 International Trainers who completed their Training of Trainer program trained 24 participants at AIR 2014 and the evaluations conducted indicated that participants were assisted to reconcile faith and sexuality. Arcus Foundation sent a representative to attend AIR 2014 and also participated in the OBY workshop at AIR. It would be wonderful if HIVOS could send a representative to AIR 2015.

Training of Trainers Program

Use of Training the Trainer (TOT) manual to train local and international trainers in a three month training program



Imam Zahed Mohamed assisted in researching content for the TOT manual. The TIC researcher assisted with completing citations for the TOT manual and Imam Muhsin complete did the editing.

Given the intensive nature of the training when we planned the program, The Inner Circle decided to extend the program from one month to three months. Participants came from France, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Uganda and Algeria. In addition, TIC decided that two senior staff, the Program Manager and the Education, Training and Wellness Officer should also do the training to boost local capacity to provide training in the South African context.

All 8 participants successfully completed their training and graduated and received their certificates at AIR 2014. The TOT trainers are now translating the TIC manual into their own languages and will start training in the first half of 2015. The TIC training materials are now currently being translated into French, Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish and training will take place in 2015 in Turkey, Algeria, France and Uganda and Kyrgyzstan. This training now allows for TIC materials to be used in international settings, thereby extending our international scope and footprint.



Impact for TIC and international beneficiaries

- Already our recently graduated international trainers facilitated the Islamic Peace Circles at AIR 2014 and evaluations from participants indicated that they not only were assisted to reconcile faith and sexuality, but were able to focus on their spiritual identity as well.
- This training will extend the international footprint of TIC and allow for more organic growth as our training interventions will now be conducted by TIC accredited trainers in a global context. 8 Trainers will be recruited for TOT 2015 and will once again train participants who will attend the Islamic Peace Circles at AIR 2015.

1. Conduct research (needs analysis in the Muslim community) to provide on demand research for TIC publication and manuals.

4 Research assistants were appointed In July 2014 and research was conducted in 4 provinces, namely Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng and Kwa Zulu Natal. 291 Interviews were conducted with queer and straight Muslims to gauge the views of South African Muslims with regard to Homosexuality. In addition 11 interviews were conducted with Muslim academics, as well as a focus group with 6 participants. The report is very detailed and thus we have attached a two page fact sheet based on the research report that outlines the responses of South African Muslims. The research report was presented at the 12th Annual International Retreat held from 12 – 19

September 2014. Hard copies were circulated to all AIR 2014 participants and the research report itself was presented in plenary as well as to the Forum for Religious Leaders.

Key findings of the report:

- 4 out of 5 Muslims recited the story of Lot as justification for condemnation of Homosexuality
- 9 out of 10 Muslims believe homosexuality is a choice
- 55% queer Muslims rejected by their families
- 4% Muslims believe that queer Muslims should be killed
- 12% Muslims expressed the view that any dialogue on Islam and Sexual Diversity is Haram (forbidden)
- 2 out of 3 Muslims willing to engage in dialogue with queer Muslims with the intention of “finding out what is wrong with them.”

This research states what Muslims currently believe and is critical not only for understanding the origin of homophobia and patriarchy in Islam, but will now further inform the content of our publications. The full research report and fact sheet summarizing the key aspects of the research report has been attached for your perusal.

Impact of research report

The factual information contained in the research report will allow us to further revise our publications and training materials. This will ensure that our information remains current and allow us to adapt our publications as well as our training interventions.

- 2. Provide mentorship to one senior TIC staff member and mentor the leadership of the Global Queer Muslim Network (GQMN) consisting of Mar’ruf based in Amsterdam, Merhaba based in Brussels, Bedayaa based in Cairo and chapters based in Sudan and Skeiv Verden based in Norway**

TIC appointed Abdul Karriem Matthews as Program Manager during April 2014. The Program Manager successfully completed the Training of Trainer program and the International Personal Empowerment Program. As part of his job description, he now takes primary responsibility for all internal operations of TIC, which includes managing staff, monitoring staff performance and all programs of the organization. In addition he is responsible for all narrative reports to donors which now allows the Executive Director to focus on the strategic positioning of The Inner Circle, internationally. The GQMN which convened at AIR 2014 was an ideal platform for network partners to reflect on progress and challenges during 2014.

Impact for GQMN representatives

- Chantel Oppelt, external facilitator, trained all GQMN representatives in processes and leadership. The GQMN was also an opportunity for representatives to be mentored by the TIC Executive Director.
- This mentoring was successful as the GQMN completed the founding documents, was able to present the GQMN to the entire AIR 2014 audience, answer questions from organizations interested in joining up with the GQMN and launch the GQMN website.

Run a successful Annual

International Retreat, securing adequate funding and suitable speakers and scholars.

Our 12th Annual International
participants attended
indicate that participants
the AIR 2014 program
speakers and topics.



more than 100
(by tool)
we attached
prominent

International Conference
Positively Muslims, a
ICEW with the assistance

organizing the
ed.

Impact for beneficiaries

- For most straight participants, ICEW and AIR 2014 was for them an opportunity to engage with queer Muslims for the very first time. Indeed for many of them it was an entry point towards understanding the narrative of queer Muslims. Many made paradigm shifts in their understanding and acceptance of diversity and this was highlighted in the ICEW evaluations by participants. Moreover, many Muslim feminists, through ICEW and their wider participation on AIR 2014, realized that their struggle against patriarchy was similar in many respects to the struggle against homophobia.
- Progressive Muslims in South Africa literally have no space to articulate their views on Orthodox Islam. Indeed, progressive Muslims and feminists in South Africa now see The Inner Circle as a safe space to articulate their critique of orthodoxy. Given this progressive development, Positively Muslims members will now be encouraged to sign up for the International Personal Empowerment Program and attend our Training of Trainer program that will allow straight Muslims to use our publications and take the TIC methodology directly to their base and membership.

The highlights of **ICEW** were as follows:



Prominent feminist academics including Dr Amina Wadud and Professor Kecia Ali presented papers that deconstructed both patriarchy and homophobia. Indeed it should be noted that at least in academic circles patriarchy and homophobia no longer hold sway and is being challenged. This development now needs to take place within an institutional framework that includes educational institutions, religion, the family etc. in order to effectively roll back these reactionary ideologies and systems of thinking.

Dr Sadiyya Shaik, a Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town conducted the Friday Sermon and Friday Prayers at AIR 2014. For the first time ever a female conducted both the Friday sermon and led a sexually diverse group of participants in Friday prayer in South Africa.

Islamic Peace Circles

24 Participants attended the Islamic Peace Circles from 12 – 14 September 2014. The International Trainers who completed their Training of Trainer Program conducted the training. Participants were divided into three groups and two trainers co-facilitated the sessions. Participants were then guided on how to reconcile faith and sexuality.

Impact for beneficiaries

Many queer Muslims who struggle with reconciling their faith and sexual identity present with behavioural issues such as addiction, risky sexual behavior, depression, suicidal thoughts and even attempt suicide. All participants who attended the Islamic Peace Circles indicated in their evaluations

that the newly trained TOT trainers did an excellent job in assisting them to reconcile their faith and sexuality. Indeed, many felt a renewed sense of spiritual identity!

Forum for Religious Leaders (FRL)

For the first time ever, The Inner Circle was able to bring 4 queer and 8 straight Imams together in one space to engage in debate on the issue of patriarchy and homophobia. In this space, queer and straight Imams sat in one space and listened to the narratives of queer Muslims and their struggle to reconcile faith and sexuality. In addition, the Imams were introduced to the outcomes of the research report as well as the views of prominent academics on both homophobia and patriarchy.

Learnings:

The Forum for Religious Leaders presented the greatest challenge for The Inner Circle for the following reasons:

- Firstly to recruit 8 straight Imams willing engage in dialogue was a serious challenge.
- All 8 straight Imams come from different contexts, educational backgrounds, different cultures which limited their interaction with each other.
- The time allocated for their presentation were too short.
- The Straight Imams have no record of writing or giving sermons based on the topics of homophobia and patriarchy.

Plan of action for 2015

- We intend to invite these same straight Imams to AIR 2015.
- Despite Internet connections the Imams will be encouraged to use TIC Friday sermons on these topics, adapt the sermon to their contexts and then deliver the sermons to their congregations. This will ensure that the TIC message of respect and acceptance of diversity goes to grassroots congregations internationally. The heart of Islam lies in the Mosque as a place of prayer. This is where we need to compassionately engage with orthodox Islam.
- TIC will take all our publications to date and all relevant publications by other scholars and send the information in a pack to the Imams.
- We believe that intensive work and training of straight Imams will give them the necessary support to engage directly with their congregations.

3. Risks

A few days before AIR 2014, Professor Taj Hargey announced the launch of an 'Open Mosque'. This announcement created an uproar in the Muslim community as the Open Mosque was linked to The Inner Circle. Subsequently, The Inner Circle and in particular Imam Muhsin received hate mail and even death threats. The Open Mosque has also been fire bombed twice in this period. The Inner Circle takes these threats seriously and we will upgrade our security as follows: We will investigate the installation of a CCTV system and a panic button and will no longer employ a receptionist. We will also employ the services of an armed response company that will react immediately to any threat against TIC staff and property. This security company is situated next to our offices and will greatly reduce any risk to TIC.



The international situation is not very positive for our agenda. Iraq, Syria and Libya face civil war and sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States are ruled by monarchs who are corrupt and allow state sponsored Imams to preach a reactionary form of Islam. The potential of the Arab Spring in Egypt has been rolled back and once again the potential for democratic ideals to take root in The

Islamic World has taken a back seat. Needless to say when people are killing each other over ideology, this has serious consequences for the work we do to compassionately engage with homophobia and patriarchy.

The Inner Circle through its work, challenges all these negative and reactionary interpretations of Islam, as we promote a compassionate engagement with this reality. However, The Inner Circle cannot do this without the assistance of our donors. The Inner Circle wishes to thank HIVOS for its continued patronage, for believing in the work that we do and for affording us a partnership opportunity to realize the vision of HIVOS which is to realize a world free from discrimination and injustice perpetrated against the LGBTI community in the name of Islam.

In the past year we developed our programmes into more coherent interventions with clear objectives and outcomes. All TIC programs are collaborative initiatives that contribute towards transforming lives.

The 2 open dialogue sessions, namely, the Forum for Religious Leaders and the International Conference for the Empowerment of women provided a platform for The Inner Circle to launch the findings of our 2014 Research into attitudes of the South African Muslim community towards

homosexuality. TIC research will have an international focus during 2015 and the findings will be presented at AIR 2015. The dialogue sessions helped to raise awareness about gender identity, sexual orientation, and roles of the Women and Role of Religious Leaders in challenging patriarchy and homophobia.