

## ***CELEBRATING CULTURALLY***

This sheet is designed for use in centres providing practical ideas and information that relate to a specific cultural event.

### ***This Issue : Tanabata (The Vega Star festival)***

Tanabata is a popular Japanese children's festival held on the seventh night of the seventh month (July 7th) which is also known as Double Sevens Night. The name Tanabata means 'the weaving loom' and sometimes 'the feast of the seven sisters'. The festival is based on an ancient Chinese myth with the story being similar to that of the Willow Plate. Loosely the story is, that once there lived a beautiful star maiden with such wondrous weaving skills that she could make silken threads from the clouds. One day she met and fell in love with a humble cowherd. They loved each other so much that they neglected their duties and were banished to the far ends of the Universe with the mighty Milky Way separating them. Because they were so unhappy, the star-crossed lovers were allowed to meet once a year, on the seventh night of the seventh month, on a bridge constructed by white doves with outstretched wings. Children construct long bamboo poles bearing rice paper festive streamers, good wishes for the lovers, and stars to represent the Milky Way. Fireworks are lit and gardens are decorated with origami stars and star streamers, and bell chimes are placed to catch any breeze. During the evening storytelling, star gazing (maybe with a telescope), puppet shows, sparklers and fireworks displays are the real features. As this is a summer festival in the Northern Hemisphere families spend the evening together outdoors celebrating with their children. It is a simple festival filled with fun and magic. Because days are extremely hot the children spend the time indoors making their stars streamers, poetry strips and decorating the bamboo poles. The long bamboo poles are the way that the children can make contact with the star crossed lovers. Messages are written in poetry style and sent to wish the lovers a better future.