African Australian Communities Leadership Forum

Preliminary Community Issues Paper

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Acknowledgments
This community issues paper was prepared pro bono in consultation with the contributors listed in this document.

The African Australian Communities Leadership Forum thanks all members, meeting attendees and stakeholders who contributed their knowledge, expertise and time towards the development of this paper.

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Executive Summary

"My vision is an Australia where African Australians are Australians"

-Youth Attendee, April 2016 meeting.

The 2011 census estimated the number of African born migrants in Victoria at 59,000 and ABS data estimates that there are about 380,000 African Australians nationally.

African Australian Coalition

The African Australian Communities Leadership Forum (AACLF) is a coalition of various African Australian community organisations and interested individuals who are committed to liaising and collaborating with government, key decision-makers and other stakeholders constructively.

Community Perspectives

This Community Issues Paper is a preliminary report. It is a collation of views, comments and perspectives of over 50 African Australian community leaders and individuals from various Sub-Saharan African Australian communities. These views were captured through AACLF focus group meetings, other community emergency meetings and stakeholder roundtable meetings organised to identify key community concerns to map out a preliminary strategic plan for further consultation and implementation.

Focus Areas

The paper identifies areas of focus, priority actions and the anticipated outcomes. The key focus areas identified are:

1. The creation of a **clearinghouse** in partnership with universities to incorporate community voices into evidence based research reports to assist policy makers in appropriate service design and delivery.
2. Providing **tailored and targeted support** to families, seniors and people marginalised by disability, mental health issues, incarceration, gender and sexual orientation.

3. **Empowering young people** with a focus on mentoring, education, entrepreneurship, employment and leadership.

4. Providing **a link and co-ordination** through an organised and appropriate governance structure to continue this work and liaise with key stakeholders.

5. Recognising that programs for African Australian communities must **include African Australians** in the design and implementation process for legitimacy, effectiveness and impact.

6. Focusing on **social justice** as the bedrock of an equitable society where there is full economic participation, affordable housing, and fair and just treatment before the law.

Strategic and action plan visual maps have been included in the paper with the focus areas linked to actions, outcomes and responsibilities as a guide for further conversations.

Next Steps

The immediate next steps include the:

1. Appointment of a Project coordinator to manage further consultation with community, government and key stakeholders and develop an implementation plan for initiatives created by each focus area committee.
2. Resourcing for focus area committees to develop, plan and prioritise key initiatives.
3. Mapping all African Australian organisations, their services and programs.
4. A final report providing evidence, research and benchmarks to support appropriate service design and delivery to the community.

Background

Africa is a continent of 54 countries with probably the greatest diversity in the world, with about 2000 different indigenous languages and ethnic groups. Amongst our migrant populations; Africa has the largest population of Indians outside of India who have been part of Africa for over 5 generations, Europeans who have remained since colonization, large populations of Malays, Lebanese, Chinese and people from other parts of the world.

Africa has many indigenous religions as well as one of the largest Islamic communities and Christian communities in the world. Africans have brought their values, diversity, resilience, hope and enthusiasm to Australia and the community is keen to contribute our greatest talents to the success of Australia.

Africa has some of the fastest growing emerging markets in the world. It is the second most populous continent with over 1.1 billion people with the largest population of young people in the world. With a growing population of African Australians, this presents a significant opportunity for bi-lateral trade and socio-cultural engagement.

As early as the 18th and 19th centuries, there are historical accounts of people of African heritage travelling to Australia usually as servants on ships. In more recent times, while a few Africans travelled to Australia as students and athletes during the White Australia policy days in the 60's, most Africans have immigrated to Australia in waves in the 1980's and 1990's and 2000's.

Many from African English speaking countries have come mainly as skilled migrants while a number have come as humanitarian entrants to escape crisis and conflict.

There are many African Australian success stories and as is normally the case with migration, the transition has also presented some challenges.

One of the key observations has been that the migration pathway into Australia is a key factor in successful settlements. Many African Australians have come to Australia as highly skilled migrants, as academics, Doctors, nurses, IT professionals, engineers and accountants. They have come from English speaking countries with a similar legal system and they have transitioned directly into mainstream Australia.

An increasing number have come as international students with a significant number undertaking post-graduate degrees. Some return home upon completion of their studies while others remain as permanent residents under various skilled migration programs. They face employment barriers, particularly while they are in transition from temporary residency to permanent residency status. Even though they have work rights while they are in transition, employers do not recognise or take advantage of their added value. They are often high achieving and multi-lingual with the significant cultural intelligence and adaptability that comes from straddling two worlds.

A large number of people have also come to Australia as humanitarian entrants often from non-English speaking backgrounds. They are often multi-lingual though the transition from crisis and an interrupted education and life can present challenges in the settlement process. Language often acts as a significant barrier to the settlement process, employment, social bonds and integration.

The transition from a rural setting or a camp setting is significant and most people do overcome and create a successful homes for themselves and their families. There are many reports on the particular challenges and successes of people who have survived

crisis and conflict and this report does not seek to expand on the totality of that experience and its impact on settlement.

Migration figures from 2015 estimate African Australian migrants as 380,000 in Australia. Western Australia has the highest number, mainly from South Africa and Zimbabwe. It is worth noting that a number of African Australians are third generation Australian born and it is unknown how many appear in these migration figures so the exact number of Australians of African heritage is believed to be more.

The Community Issues Paper

The AACLF is an open organisation with no formal leader or membership. It was formed in 2015 with various key decision-makers invited every few months to speak and provide insight into issues of community concern. Guests have included, Acting Victoria Police Chief Commissioner, Tim Cartwright, Helen Kapalos, Chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, John Searle QC, Chair of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) and other key stakeholders.

In March 2016, a very public riot in the city created an avalanche of negative media coverage and community concern. Many of the most impacted community groups convened to identify the issues and discuss possible solutions. The AACLF convened an urgent meeting with Victoria Police represented by Deputy Commissioner Andrew Crisp, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Finance, the Opposition spokesperson for Multicultural Affairs with the member for Essendon staying on to represent the Minister.

This meeting was open to all community members and a robust strategic plan conversation was facilitated by a facilitator. A subsequent meeting was organised with additional community members to amend and confirm the basis of the issues paper. In total there were community leaders and members representing most sub Saharan African Australian community groups.

This report is not an academic research paper. Rather, it is a report on the views and comments of about 50 African community leaders and members from of Sub-Saharan African Australian communities. These views were captured through AACLF focus group meetings, other community emergency meetings and stakeholder roundtable meetings organised to establish key community concerns.

It represents the community views at a particular point in time. This means some views and experiences may not be fully captured. However from the diversity of the professional and personal experiences of various attendees, this report is a reasonable start to understanding and collating some of the key issues and concerns.

The issues paper has been primarily prepared as a community document; by community for community. It is intentionally simple in its articulation and design to facilitate conversations across a broad range of community members and key external stakeholders. A deep dive into various community issues will require further consultation with respective groups and communities who can add their specific context and expand on their respective experiences and unique solutions.

It is hoped that this preliminary document will assist further consultation with community and key stakeholders to assist in refining the needs, measures and timelines of the any initiatives flowing from the action plans included in this paper.

Introduction

Australia is an established multicultural country. From its beginning as the land of its First Nations, to the arrival of early settlers from Europe, Afghanistan and China to the continuing waves of migration from all over the world.

Every group has made significant social, cultural and economic contributions. The government, with various policy frameworks and laws has attempted to foster cohesiveness through assimilation, integration and now multiculturalism. Every group has similarly faced challenges and over time they have figured out the best way to live within the parameters, nuances and practices of the society. While the challenges have similar overarching themes, each group will have it's own peculiarities from its particular strengths, capabilities and struggles.

While there have been papers written by organisations, academics, various government agencies and departments about the African Australian community, this paper attempts to collate a range of current community perspectives to get a snapshot by the community directly to decision makers.

Methodology

The methodology for the development of the paper was simple. As the AACLF was already established based on trusting and respectful relationships, it became the conduit to invite community members and leaders to discuss community concerns, identify issues and start discussions on preliminary solutions.

The AACLF acted as the coordinating body gathering comments through meetings, extensive teleconferences, digital communications and information gathered through members and leaders attending or organising their own community meetings and providing relevant information. This has created the first phase-the community issues paper.

The next phase is the appointment of a project coordinator to conduct much more robust consultations with community and key stakeholders in government, the not for profit sector and the private sector to develop a project implementation plan.

An academic researcher would also be required to provide robust evidence based research and information to ensure relevant outcomes. This research role should be resourced to support the project coordinator by providing detailed analysis and evaluation of the findings and initiatives flowing from the report.

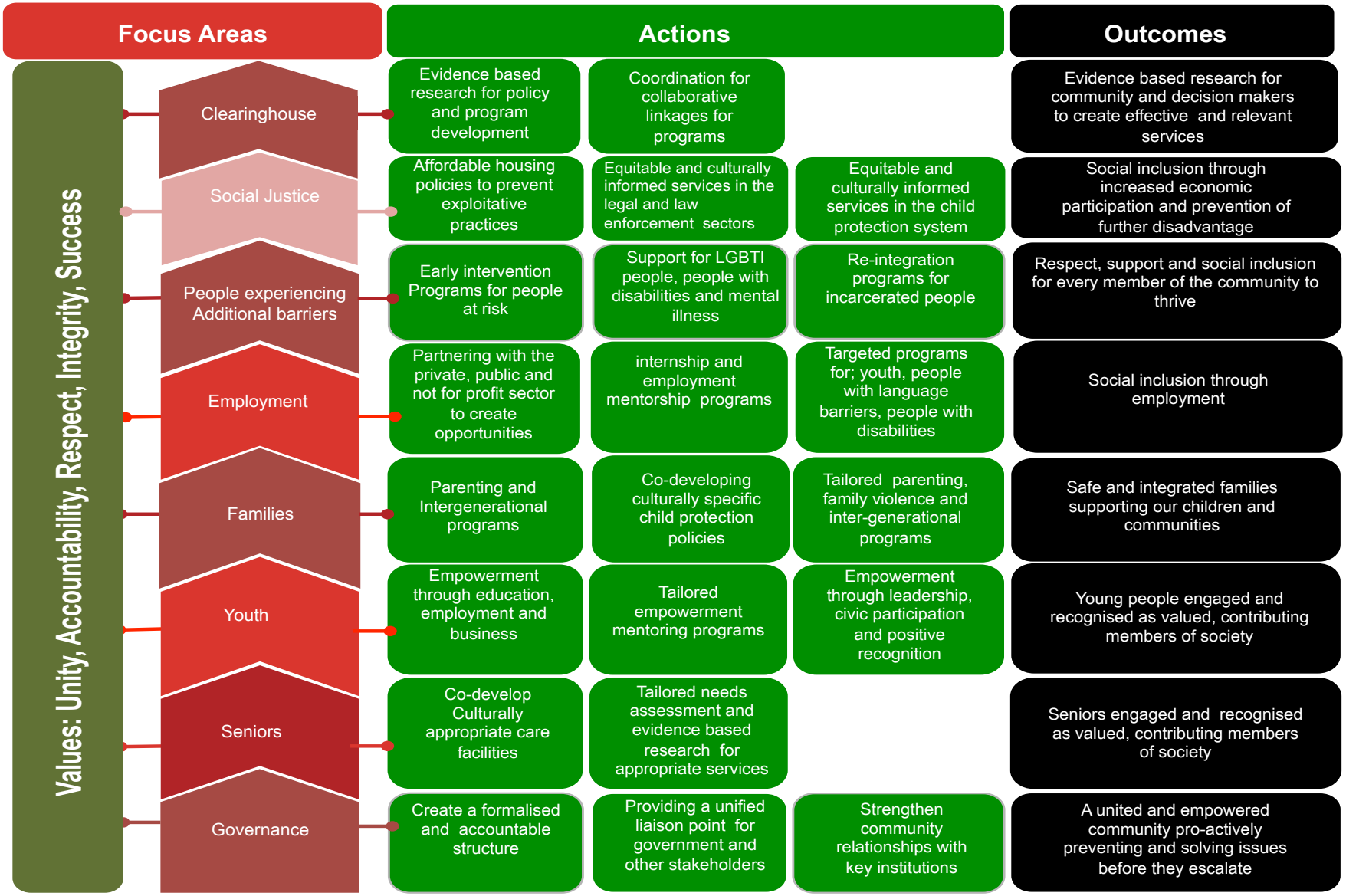
At the completion of the process a final report will be prepared. This should detail an action implementation plan, a research paper and a plain language guide (in various languages) to increase community accessibility.

Principles

Each section in the report is written very concisely to capture the essence of the issues raised, solutions proposed and the benefits. The key theme that emerged was ensuring appropriate and responsive services for the community. The overarching principles include:

1. Services and opportunities must be accessible, equitable, appropriate and targeted to specific community needs
2. Community involvement in all phases of service design and delivery is critical.
3. Consult respective communities to collaboratively problem solve

Figure 1. Strategy at a glance



1 Develop a Clearinghouse

Issue: There is no fully funded research specific organisation dedicated to focusing or capturing data and evidence to contextualise the issues of the African Australian community. This has led to missed opportunities to:

- Conduct key research
- Collaboratively problem-solve
- Provide robust advice to government and other agencies
- Provide sustained community assistance by being a hub for corporate community knowledge and ongoing research and an information resource.

Proposal: The development of a clearinghouse was proposed as a solution to collect data, conduct research, and distribute information. It will act as a data warehouse for African Australian community organisations. Many universities partner with community groups to understand major social issues and provide research support.

A number of AACLF members are academics and they have commenced talks with university partners to attempt to consolidate this option.

Benefits: Some of the benefits include providing:

1. Multi-disciplinary research excellence that incorporates evidence based data, grassroots knowledge and community voices into policy development
2. A central hub for knowledge dissemination and a link for community organisations to form collaborative partnerships for grants to develop relevant services and programs
3. Facilitation of roundtable discussions with key stakeholders
4. Periodic research to determine baseline and benchmarks which can be used to support grant and funding applications, program development and service delivery.

NEXT STEPS

- Conduct digital survey to map all African Australian organisations based on missions, programs and key contacts.
- Partner with a nominated university for clearinghouse support.
- Appoint university academics to oversee process.
- Appoint research students to conduct process.
- Conduct launch to notify community and government stakeholders.

2 Improve Social Justice Outcomes

Issue: Many community members experience significant challenges when engaging with the justice system. Many young people shared experiences about receiving very harsh penalties at every point in the system; from receiving significant charges from police for minor infringements like jay walking (harsh charges like this were colloquially termed, 'hamburger with the lot' by some people), to pleading to all the charges with minimal negotiation due to language barriers, no interpreters and poor communication with legal service providers. The cultural barriers for some communities are significant and create issues that become amplified and entrenched with each interaction further down the line in the justice system.

Below is a composite of various case studies to illustrate the experience of some community members.

A mother with eight children uses physical discipline to admonish one of her children. The school becomes aware and child protection become involved. They remove the child, place them with a family that may be culturally inappropriate or in residential care. The child becomes exposed to other problematic habits and negative influences. They run away from residential care and engage in illegal activity to fund bad habits or to survive independently. Without any connection to their family and community, they become lost. If they continue with the same pattern, they soon get a criminal record as adults and become excluded from the employment. Lack of employment and other opportunities fosters a pattern of re-engagement with the criminal justice system. What started off as a matter that could have easily resolved with the appropriate interventions and information has become a social and financial burden for the state and community.

Due to the significant and unfortunate impact of the legal system on some community members, particularly young people, it is important to have a social justice and cultural lens to prevent entrenched disadvantage arising from issues that could be easily resolved with targeted and appropriate information sessions on the justice system.

Financial exploitation

Some community members with low English language proficiency have been targeted by fraudsters. Some have been exploited by rogue real estate agents collecting significant deposits for homes and then absconding with the money and providing nothing in return. In a climate of housing challenges and unaffordability for the broader community, the impact on marginalised communities can be much more severe putting incredible pressures of families.

Some people with low or no incomes have accrued debts to the value of tens of thousands of dollars through civil penalties and infringements including drinking in a public place and parking fines. This has escalated because the individual had poor or low level English language skills and a poor understanding of the legal system, their options or ability to negotiate alternative payment methods. Some people have been unable to read summons and court notices and letters and have missed court dates in relation to these civil penalties. Several missed court dates have led to some people being arrested and imprisoned.

Solutions: Awareness, information and education programs co-developed with community for community and service providers. This awareness will form the basis of developing appropriate early intervention and prevention programs to prevent youth disengagement, family disintegration and inappropriate justice outcomes.

Increased interpreter services in the most common African languages to ensure community understanding when engaging with the legal system and other agencies.

Culturally appropriate family re-integration programs to prioritise the return of children to their families and provide proper information and support for families to receive children without the need for further long term engagement with these services. The key recommended solution is ensuring the justice system is more responsive and accessible to the community through awareness training. Many community members identified the learnings from the Aboriginal community and stated their keenness to respectfully learn from them where relevant.

Benefits: The community are hyper aware of the need for adequate and equitable policing and legal services.
They have expressed a keen desire to be better informed and to work collaboratively with the police and legal system.

Providing information and culturally appropriate education at the earliest opportunity will save costs incurred from significant legal involvement and preserve family structures to provide a stronger support structure for young people.

Additional benefits include early and appropriate diagnosis of challenges before they become entrenched and opportunities to work with policy makers to develop tailored and useful awareness programs and appropriate services and significant cost saving to taxpayers by focusing social investments in prevention.

NEXT STEPS

- Provide sustainable funding for African Australian community organisation engaged in justice and legal information, awareness and training.
- Develop culturally appropriate and targeted programs to inform community about the justice system and improve service delivery.
- Develop information programs for professionals in the social justice system to become aware of the cultural context and any barriers impacting community.

3 Supporting People facing additional barriers

Issue: The experience of prejudice is not unfamiliar to many members of the community. As a result, respecting the human rights of all people is a fundamental value in the African Australian community. A number of people experience prejudice and exclusion on many fronts. In addition, some groups experience additional barriers and stigmatisation because of the intersectional of their experiences and identities. For instance, some people may experience exclusion based on their heritage; this can be further heightened by their experience of being incarcerated or having mental health issues. Many people experience discrimination on several fronts; religious, gender and ethnicity. This excludes people, exacerbates their challenges and entrenches further disadvantage. People with disabilities and LGBTI people also face significant barriers towards acceptance, full participation and full social inclusion.

Additional barriers recognised included social isolation due to language and geographical barriers (for people living in rural regional and remote areas), people experiencing family violence and people affected by substance abuse. Many of these people are further marginalised which impacts their employment prospects and well being.

Proposal: Awareness, information and education programs have been proposed to de-stigmatise and create pathways to respect, understanding, acceptance and full community inclusion.

This awareness will form the basis of developing appropriate early intervention and prevention programs to prevent disengagement, substance abuse, family violence and help reduce and manage mental health concerns appropriately.

Benefits: Some of the benefits include early and appropriate diagnosis of challenges before they become entrenched and opportunities to work with policy makers to develop tailored and useful resources for awareness and inclusion programs.

NEXT STEPS

- Provide sustainable funding for African Australian community organisation already engaged in this work.
- Develop early intervention and prevention programs
- Develop resources and programs to inform and create accepting and resilient communities.

4 Strengthening Families

Issues: The family is such a fundamental part of any society and for the African Australian community it is even more critical. The notion of family is broad yet very close knit and the experience of being in another country creates a heightened desire to preserve those bonds at all costs.

The range of problems identified included intergenerational challenges as a result of different parenting and cultural expectations when families are parenting children born or raised in Australia without adapting their parenting. In some instances, this has led to families fracturing and in more serious situations, the involvement of authorities including child protection.

Proposals: The solutions proposed by community members included creating relevant and targeted parenting and intergenerational programs, culturally specific child protection programs and policies to maintain family relationships and facilitate successful family re-integration. Additional areas of focus include female empowerment programs, male mentoring programs, at-risk youth programs and re-integration of incarcerated people. Some African Australian individuals and organisations are involved in prison visitation programs which they self-fund or participate in partnerships with other organisations.

Family violence remained an area of concern in navigating the legal system and redefining boundaries and respectful relationships in a new setting. All attendees agreed that identifying, evaluating and co-designing current programs were critical to prevent family violence and develop appropriate responses that have minimal impact on families and victims when it occurs.

Benefits: The benefits include ensuring families are informed and involved in preventative measures to ensure children are safe from harm and negative influences. While most African Australian families have been successful in Australia, a cultural centre could provide additional opportunities to create a hub and centralised resources and programs where challenged families can engage in recreational activities and interact with the vast number of families that have been successful in Australia. This ensures a strengths based approach rather than the common response and deficit models that have proven ineffective.

NEXT STEPS

- Through the clearinghouse, identify and link relevant African Australian organisations to relevant family programs and conduct program evaluations.
- Engage the service providers and work with communities to adapt the programs to ensure appropriateness.
- Create new, innovative programs to fill program and service delivery gaps.

5 Empowering young people

Issue: Many young African Australians have been very successful academically, socially, in the arts, sports and in entertainment. Many have been extremely pro-active in creating youth led not for profit volunteer organisations to help with mentoring, mental health concerns and other issues.

There is a burgeoning and vibrant arts and cultural scene where young people are curating and creating original art, running fashion shows, organising concerts, festivals, developing contemporary Afro-inspired fashion brands and developing a powerful spoken word scene in the tradition of African griots of Western Africa and oral historians across the continent.

These young people have travelled abroad, won awards and are creating enterprises to sustain themselves. They are partnering with talented individuals and communities abroad and are literally fashioning a unique Afro-Australian culture that could be a readily exportable commodity with additional and broader support and intentional focus.

However a few young people are disengaged and face particular challenges; particularly unaccompanied minors, people with unresolved trauma from conflict migration, people with language difficulties, and people with poor educational outcomes, reduced employment prospects and opportunities.

Children

A number of young people are placed in classes that are age appropriate but not socially and academically appropriate due to their low or no English language proficiency and prior low or no educational exposure. This increases the dropout rate, disengagement and at risk behaviour. For a lot of people the critical ages of 14-17 years are critical years for early intervention and prevention as the key drop out rate seems to occur at 16 years or grade 10.

Many younger people sought significant parental involvement in their schooling and sporting activities and for single parents with large families, this was not always possible. In addition, families with low English language proficiency struggled to engage with the educational system as they were unable to read school letters and reports and participate in school activities. Many young people identified parental involvement in schools and after school activities, particularly sport and the arts as critical to feeling valued, cared for and socially included.

International students

Some young people have come as university students and have no structured internships programs on the completion of their studies making employment extremely challenging. While they are waiting for their temporary residency status to become permanent,

employers are not interested in employing them even though they have a legal right to work. This exposes international students to exploitation. In their desperation to work, a number of people accept wages below the award rate or remain unemployed for longer periods even with a Masters degree or PhD earned in a top Australian University.

Social Inclusion

A number of young people continue to share experiences about social exclusion, bias and discrimination on many fronts. The main contexts mentioned included:

- Outright racial abuse and threats in public places, particularly directed at Muslim women in religious clothing.
- Continued questioning by police when young people walked around in groups
- Bias and hyper vigilance by security personnel in public places, particularly shops in; the most popular being the incident at an Apple store where young boy sin their school uniform where asked to leave a store to limit security concerns. This led to the school Principal publicly naming and shaming the store and the Apple CEO publicly apologising.

All these any many similar experiences have the compounding impact of making people feel like they do not belong. A lack of belonging has significant impacts on people's sense of identity, value, contribution and participation. The vicious cycle created by racist and exclusionary practices is that it creates the very thing we want to prevent; people with a fractured and fragile sense of belonging and identity leading to fragile societies and a lack of social cohesion.

Some community groups have worked with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) to develop human rights awareness so community members are able to navigate, report, and deal effectively with these challenges.

Young People and the Justice system

While the paper was originally prepared in May, there was continuing media and concern about young people, 'gangs' and crime. The most recent Crime Statistic Agency figures indicated that while youth crime was decreasing, recidivism was significant and on the rise with younger people committing more daring crimes. While the police were at pains to state that youth crime and the so-called gangs were of diverse backgrounds with 60% being Australian born, the prevailing media narrative was that it was young people of African heritage committing these crimes.

The challenge for community was not just managing the unfortunate narrative but dealing with the fact that a few quite young people, from our community were involved in these serious offences.

The community is desperate to understand the underlying issues and collaboratively work with all relevant government departments, agencies and community organisations.

Media reporting and representation

A key concern raised by many community members, particularly young people has been ethically and socially responsible media reporting. When communities are 'new and few', the opportunities for the broader community to directly engage with them is very limited. Therefore the only lens through which the broader community knows the new community is through the media. Negative reporting not only inflames tensions, breeds misunderstanding and mistrust but has a huge impact on

employability and the confidence of the new communities; particularly people sometime too young to articulate the hurt, embarrassment and present the truth.

The community at large noted that social cohesion was a goal they all aspired to and the media was identified as a key factor, if not the most important vehicle, in promoting social cohesion through stories that were respectful, provided education, and involved broader community perspectives.

Respectful representation of African Australians will contribute to the normalisation of people of African heritage in Australia as Australians. This can be done through various channels; including the incorporation of African content on television from the continent or African Australian content developed in Australia or content created by the broader African diaspora.

Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, is the second most prolific film industry in the world. There is quality broadcast content from all African countries and countries with large African populations in South America, Europe and North America. There are opportunities for our national broadcasters to acquire ready made content that normalises the African experience, educates the broader Australian public and provides avenues of pride for young African Australians who sometimes only have world vision adverts as their only visual context of their heritage.

Proposals: While some challenges are becoming entrenched, the solutions proposed require long term, on-ongoing assistance, funding and collaborative efforts amongst community, government and other stakeholders, including the private sector for increased employment pathways. In addition, many young people have phenomenal leadership, creative and sporting talents that should be harnessed. Many organisations are reaching out already to various sporting organisations to act as a funnel for talented people to have sustained and professional exposure to various sports as an employment pathway.

To counter the drop-out rate, ongoing 'English as a second language' courses should be resourced for parents and young people. There are a number of teachers in the community and some have specific expertise in teaching English as a second language. The programs they create should be adequately resourced to stem the tide of young people increasingly dropping out of high school and ensuring their parents are fully aware and capable of participating in all aspects of their lives to offer support.

In relation to the challenges with the justice system and social inclusion, the community proposed a rights based approach to educating service providers in the public and private sectors. Victoria has a Charter of human rights as well as other anti-discrimination legislative frameworks like the Equal Opportunity Act; these laws were identified as useful tools for people and a framework for applying and understanding the rights and responsibilities of communities and service providers alike. The community are keen to collaborate to problem-solve. Their key concern was early intervention and prevention and to encourage the government and policy makers to invest in cost saving measures at early stages in education, health, sports and the arts and divest from the high expense from over reliance on the response system;

in prisons. The community recognised the challenges facing police and other frontline staff ensuring the safety of the community and believe that a focus on community engagement would build trust, collaboration and co-operation.

In addition, the creation of a unique African Australian cultural centre or youth centre would inspire community and be a platform to inform and share our culture with the broader community. This cultural, arts and sports centre was proposed as an invaluable asset to provide incredible personal and community dividends. This space can be used for youth events and to recognise young people to promote positive narratives to the broader community.

As young people mature and gain experience, recognising their desires for leadership and agency in determining their own future is crucial. Many young people are interested in leadership opportunities, civic participation, community advocacy and policy development. While there are a number of good leadership programs focused on the community, civic participation programs were raised as an area of interest.
In developing programs for young people, it was important that the programs are led by young people for young people and their capacity to deliver programs themselves are supported.

Other proposals included, support for the community to tell their own stories to counter negative stereotypes and incentives to increase the employment of African Australian journalists on TV and Radio broadcasting to normalise our existence in Australia.

Benefits: Additional educational and varied employment opportunities; including the harnessing of African Australian talent and the normalising the African Australian experience and contributions through fair and ethical reporting and a broad range of African Australian media representation

NEXT STEPS

- Conduct a needs assessment with young people to develop relevant internship and employment programs.
- Develop educational programs to re-engage people with educational challenges; particularly English as a second language courses.
- Explore the feasibility of a cultural centre and develop a platform to recognise young people and harness their talents
- Develop a strategic plan and work with the media to: establish a socially responsible and ethical reporting framework on vulnerable young people and minority communities, establish representation frameworks that include African Australians in media roles, build community capacity and ensure normalised representation through the acquisition of African Australian, African and African diaspora content for media broadcast.
- Service providers should use a rights based approach to deliver services; training should be resourced by government and co-developed with community to inform expectations, rights and responsibilities

6 Employment

Issues: Like many other Australians, African Australians have immigrated to Australia as skilled migrants or humanitarian entrants. Some people have come from countries where English is not the official language and/or their educational and employments opportunities have been interrupted by conflict or crisis. This impacts people's ability to fully access employment opportunities. Sometimes a lack of awareness about the skills, abilities, resilience and incredible work ethic of African Australians can also create barriers to employment. As a result some community members are unemployed or significantly under employed.

Proposals: In partnership with employers, business and community, conduct a needs assessment to match community members in need to the right employers. This needs assessment is particularly useful for low skilled employees and large employment companies. An economic social responsibility project to place low skilled employees or long term unemployed people from marginalised communities, with large employers could be incentivised by government. Africa has some of the highest concentrations of entrepreneurs in the world and the highest number of female entrepreneurs in the world. The development of entrepreneurial programs to assist people to start their own business in a competitive employment market would be an additional way to engage people in the economic life of the country where employment employments are somewhat limited.

Benefits: Full economic participation through employment and entrepreneurship particularly for people experiencing the greatest barriers.
Partnerships between community and employers which will contribute to a knowledge bank for government and other new communities on additional ways to engage people economically.

NEXT STEPS

- In partnership with employers, connect people facing barriers to employment opportunities.
- Develop entrepreneurial programs to create alternative pathways to economic opportunities.
- Conduct ongoing research on innovative employment and entrepreneurial pathways.

7 Supporting Seniors

Issue: The greatest waves of African migration to Australia occurred in the 1980's and after 2000. A significant and increasing number of African Australians are 55 years old and over. It is also becoming increasingly acknowledged that most African Australians will remain and not return back to Africa as previously imagined. Residential care facilities will have to adapt to the specific needs of senior African Australians who may be placed in care facilities.

Traditionally in African societies, seniors live independently in communal settings or live with their families and are accorded a very special status in society. There are a lot of unknowns in terms of the needs of this demographic and how to create or adapt current care arrangements with cultural expectations and needs; particularly people who may not have been fully socially included into the broader society or face language and other barriers.

Proposals: A number of solutions were proposed such as conducting research into the numbers and needs of senior African Australians. This will assist the government with future planning, policy development and appropriate service delivery. It is also crucial to investigate the specific ways senior African Australians can remain engaged and active members of community.

Benefits: The benefits include providing research excellence to understand the numbers, needs and other relevant data of senior African Australians to ensure adapted service delivery if and when required and robust policy development.

NEXT STEPS

- Conduct evidence based research to determine numbers and needs of senior African Australians
- Develop culturally relevant programs and resources to inform service providers of their needs

8 Governance

Issue: As the African Australian population has grown, a number of community organisations have been formed mainly to cater to various communities along countries of origin or ethnicities. Other organisations have been formed to cater to various needs such as cultural festivals, mentoring, female empowerment and employment.

The African Australian population is estimated to be about 380,000 people nationally. A number of community leaders and academics believe this figure to be well over 400,000 nationally in 2016.

At this stage, there is no central agency or organisation to provide a liaison point for government, policy and other decision makers.

Proposal: With a population as large and as diverse as the African Australian population, it has become evident that a more fomalised structure would assist the community advocate on a range of issues.

The community recognises that the African Australian community is amongst the most diverse by religion, ethnicity, language and needs. As a result the governance structure chosen by community will reflect this diversity. It could be a similar model to those of the Jewish communities, Islamic Communities and Chinese communities.

Benefits: The benefits include providing an organisation that is democratic and accountable to community and government. Improving service and program delivery outcomes and linking policy makers with a broader range of voices for consultations.

NEXT STEPS

- Develop an accountable and democratic governance structure to act as a liaison point for decision makers, to advocate for the broader range of African Australian community organisations and to link policy makers and agencies with other community organisations and voices for more robust consultations.

Summary Recommendations

Create a Clearinghouse

- Map all African Australian organisations based on pupose, programs and key contacts.
- Partner with nominated university for clearinghouse support.
- Appoint university academics to oversee process.
- Appoint research students to conduct process.
- Conduct launch to notify community and government stakeholders.

An accessible and equitable social justice system

- Ensure access and equity is a fundamental principle underpinning all facets of the justice system.
- Provide sustainable funding for African Australian community organisation already engaged in human rights awareness work.
- Develop early intervention and prevention programs in collaboration with the community
- Develop culturally appropriate and targeted programs to inform community about the justice system and improve service delivery.
- Develop police and legal service specific programs to rebuild community trust and collaboration.

Supporting marginalised people

- Fund African Australian community organisation already engaged in this work
- Develop culturally appropriate early intervention and prevention programs delivered by community.
- Develop resources and programs to inform and create accepting and resilient communities.
- All these programs should be developed by or with community and delivered by community.

Supporting Families

- Through the clearinghouse, identify and link relevant African Australian organisations to relevant family programs and conduct evaluation.
- Engage the service providers and work with communities to adapt the programs to ensure appropriateness.
- Create new, innovative programs to fill program and service delivery gaps.

Youth Empowerment

- In partnership with employers, connect young people to employment opportunities.
- With young people, conduct a needs assessment and develop relevant programs.
- Develop educational programs to re-engage people with educational challenges.
- Explore the feasibility of an African Australian cultural centre and develop a platform to recognise young people.

Employment

- In partnership with employers, connect people facing barriers to employment opportunities; with a focus on young people and long term unemployed
- Develop entrepreneurial programs to create alternative pathways to economic opportunities.
- Conduct ongoing research on innovative employment and entrepreneurial pathways.

Understanding and supporting the needs of our ageing demographic

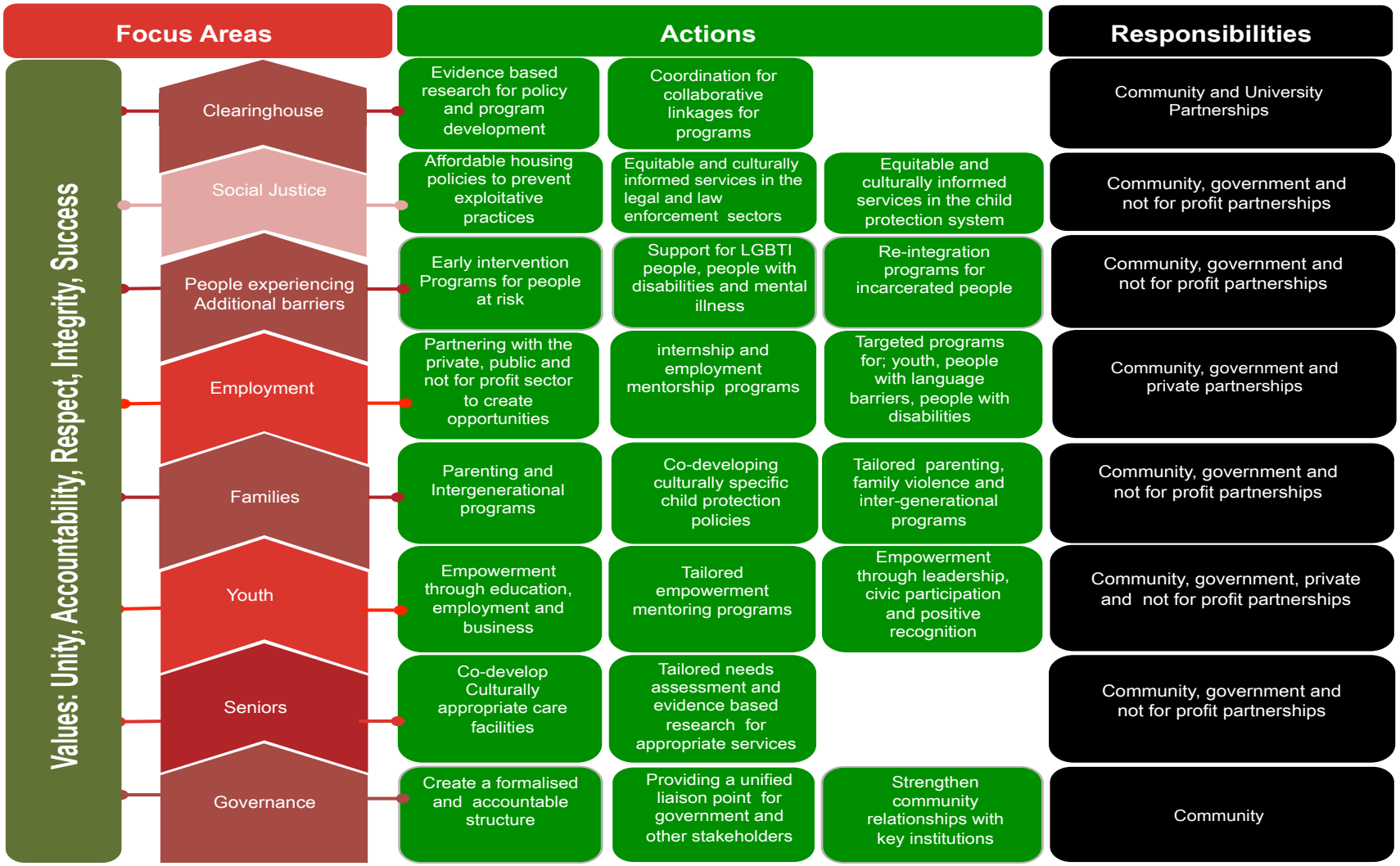
Conduct evidence based research to determine numbers and needs of senior African Australians.

- Develop culturally relevant programs and resources to inform service providers of their needs.

Governance

- Develop an accountable and democratic governance structure for African Australian community organisations to act as a liaison point and advocacy body for decision makers.

Figure 2. Action Plan



Conclusion

The African Australian community is a highly visible minority community. Being a visible minority can make successes and particularly failings, no matter the reality of the data, amplified.

There remain many good news stories across the community in metropolitan and regional Victoria. Some examples include some regional areas having African owned clinics and Doctors as their sole health providers, young people overcoming employment barriers by starting their own innovative enterprises. The arts and culture are accessible industries where many people have particularly capitalised on their cultural strengths to create; powerful spoken word communities, entrainment, talent management and event management businesses amongst many other exciting examples of people commercialising their creativity.

These industries started by young people in the African diaspora have been harnessed and developed to become multi-billion dollar industries in Europe and the United States of America. This is an incredible opportunity for the community in Australia.

Preparing this report has been a time for community reflection on where we are, where we want to be and the many ways we want to continue contributing to Australia. After the initial settlement support, the settlement processes for communities usually happens organically and without sufficient long-term collaborative community planning.

This is an opportune time for the African Australian community to take an active role in planning for the future at this stage of our settlement and establishment in collaboration with the government and key stakeholders. It is anticipated that the visual map and plans in this report can assist with focused grant and funding applications. To that end it is noted that this is not the total capture of all community concerns. To do that, additional consultation can be held with focus groups of women, families, young people, men, seniors and any other demographic to achieve a deeper understanding of more particular needs and issues.

To that end, this report has been created as a discussion paper for further consultation with community, government and key stakeholders.

It is also a simple template for further communication with community to confirm the community vision and map all the African Australian community organisations, their existing services and programs.

The collation of this paper has been prepared with due care to ensure accessibility across the range and diversity of readers within the African Australian community. It is deliberately short with visual maps to facilitate community and stakeholder discussions.

To facilitate the next steps, a survey will be sent across the African Australian community in Victoria to map all the existing African Australian community organisations, their programs and services.

The results of the survey will form part of a final report being prepared by the project coordinator and reasercher. The final document will contribute to the development of an implementation plan to guide our future steps.

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**This is primarily a community document intended to be accessible to the broad range of people from community and government, including people with diverse English language proficiencies. The visual snapshot of the strategic and action plans are to aid conversations with the broad demographic represented in the community.*