|  |
| --- |
|  |
| Response to Discussion Paper – 2009 African Australians:   |
| A report on human rights and social inclusion issues |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
|  |

# Mercy Family Services - who we are

Mercy Family Services provides services for vulnerable children, young people and families at a variety of settings throughout South East Queensland.

One of the programs within Mercy Family Services is the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Refugee Minor Program (UHRMP). Unaccompanied Humanitarian Refugee Minors are young people with refugee backgrounds under the age of 18 years who arrive in Australia without parental support.

This program is funded by Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the State Department of Communities to support and resource all Unaccompanied Humanitarian Refugee Minors (UHRM) who enter Queensland.

The number of our clients from African backgrounds is around 120 and has declined over the past year as the Government moves to supporting families from other parts of the world. Currently we have involvement with over 70 African Australian families from 10 different African nations. Our work embraces the needs of all carer-family members as the settlement of our client is dependent upon the proper functioning of the whole family unit.

The UHRMP staff comprises a Coordinator, three caseworkers and a Youth and Family Support Worker. Two members are from African backgrounds. This team has put together this response to the Discussion Paper**.**

Contents

[Mercy Family Services who we are 2](#_Toc236100709)

[An overview from our perspective 5](#_Toc236100710)

[The structure of our Response 5](#_Toc236100711)

[PART ONE: PRE MIGRATION 6](#_Toc236100712)

[1. Previous Life Experiences 6](#_Toc236100713)

[*Suggestions* 6](#_Toc236100714)

[2. The Refugee Experience 7](#_Toc236100715)

[Suggestions 8](#_Toc236100716)

[3. Role of UN and Australian Government. 8](#_Toc236100717)

[Suggestions 9](#_Toc236100718)

[*More Suggestions* 10](#_Toc236100719)

[*Consulting refugees prior to Arrival in Australia* 10](#_Toc236100720)

[PART TWO: HONEYMOON PHASE 11](#_Toc236100721)

[4. The right information and the right understanding at the right time 11](#_Toc236100722)

[*Suggestions* 13](#_Toc236100723)

[Knowledge and skills for the transition into education or the work force 13](#_Toc236100724)

[Transitional integration into a more appropriate formal education 13](#_Toc236100725)

[5. Education 14](#_Toc236100726)

[*Suggestions* 14](#_Toc236100727)

[An “improved” Milpera as a model 14](#_Toc236100728)

[*Suggestions for educators (Q2.12)* 16](#_Toc236100729)

[6. Few Opportunities to be Included in the Wider Australian Community 17](#_Toc236100730)

[*Suggestions around inclusion of newly arrived* 17](#_Toc236100731)

[7. Managing Money 18](#_Toc236100732)

[*Suggestion* 19](#_Toc236100733)

[8. Health 19](#_Toc236100734)

[*Suggestion (relates to Q 3.4, Q 3.13 and Q 3.18)* 20](#_Toc236100735)

[*Consulting refugees during the honeymoon phase in Australia* 20](#_Toc236100736)

[PART THREE: SIX MONTHS TO TWO YEARS 21](#_Toc236100737)

[9. Housing 21](#_Toc236100738)

[Limited or poor Rental Histories (relates to Q4.6) 22](#_Toc236100739)

[Understanding rental systems (relates to Q 4.11) 23](#_Toc236100740)

[Suggestions 23](#_Toc236100741)

[Large families 24](#_Toc236100742)

[*Suggestion* 25](#_Toc236100743)

[Discrimination 25](#_Toc236100744)

[*Suggestion relating to Q 4.11* 25](#_Toc236100745)

[Nomadic youth and Homelessness 26](#_Toc236100746)

[*Suggestions* 27](#_Toc236100747)

[Housing sector support (relates to Q 4.13) 27](#_Toc236100748)

[*Suggestion* 28](#_Toc236100749)

[Coordination of services FOR African Australians (relating to Q4.14) 28](#_Toc236100750)

[10. Employment and training needs 29](#_Toc236100751)

[*Suggestions* 29](#_Toc236100752)

[*Suggestions* 30](#_Toc236100753)

[*Suggestion* 30](#_Toc236100754)

[*Consulting African Australians during the 6 months to 2 year phase in Australia* 30](#_Toc236100755)

[PART FOUR: TWO YEARS ONWARD 31](#_Toc236100756)

[*Suggestions* 31](#_Toc236100757)

[PART FIVE: CONCLUSION 32](#_Toc236100758)

# An overview from our perspective

Before we begin we would like to congratulate the Project Steering Committee & Community Reference Group on the many achievements in the report. Firstly the committee & group recognise African Australians. One of our colleagues laments that even after living in Australia for nearly 10 years he is publicly called an African Refugee. This ongoing labelling has many negative aspects. For example the media uses descriptors such as Sudanese refugees as negatives which cause a huge obstacle for all Africans to achieve full participation in our society.

Like the committee and group we understand that there is a wide diversity of Africans entering Australia and that they have many different experiences both prior to arrival and once in Australia. It is easy to stereotype (as we have seen the media do on so many occasions), but this is to the detriment of welcoming and including African Australians. Rarely do we see positive stories of the remarkable courage and achievements made by members of these communities in their journeys towards become fully participating Australians. In our program we experience firsthand the resilience and hard work of many newly arrived African Australians. We also experience their joys, their sorrows and their many small steps towards participation and for many their excitement at getting their Australian citizenship.

Some statements below don’t apply to all arrivals from Africa, but to some African Australians who we believe are missing out on full participation or have to jump huge hurdles to achieve it.

Some of our remarks could apply to other newly arrived migrants. One of the big differences is that Africans are more physically visible. Although there are other new ethnic groups arriving, such as the Karen and Iraqis, these people are not immediately distinguishable from ethnic groups that have been here a long time.

Through our work we have identified some common barriers to successful settlement. We have looked at some suggestions for change or areas where further work needs to be extended to identify solutions.

# The structure of our Response

Rather than following the Discussion Paper’s framework, our response is based on the chronology of the settlement process: pre migration, the first six months the “honeymoon” period as often identified, 6 months to 2 years, and concluding with post two years. It will illustrate barriers through telling stories, as identified by individual workers or our group. Where possible we have related the response back to questions in the discussion paper or to comments made in the paper.

At the end of each part we have looked at the discussion paper’s “overarching consideration” – how to support genuine participation of African Australians in decision–making about program and service design and implementation across all areas.

This structure reveals some of the barriers facing newly arrived African Australians and how different approaches can be trialled to lower the barriers they encounter and assist them to participate fully in Australian society. We also provide examples of what we see as working well.

Settlement is like any learning process - if parts are skipped it can make later learning more difficult or in some cases impossible. We support early intervention where possible as in most cases it provides the best solutions and we believe it is cost effective.

Our experience of African Australians is with those in Visa classes 200, 202 and 204.

# PART ONE: PRE MIGRATION

In the pre migration phase we have used the term refugee in a generic way to describe those who are accepted in to Australia on all refugee and humanitarian visa types.

All of our clients are children whose parents are not in Australia or are orphans. We use the term carer to apply to the primary person responsible for our clients. Bear in mind that some of our comments would also apply to African Australian parents that we encounter in our work, who may be caring for our clients and their own children.

Below are some of the barriers at this phase (which we have not ranked in priority). This section has been broken into three main subsections – previous life experiences of refugees, the actual refugee experience and the roles the UN and Governments play prior to settlement.

## Previous Life Experiences

In a general sense we find that the most successful settlement is by educated city dwellers who did not spend long periods in refugee camps. The least successful are those who have lived in remote villages where all family members have limited education or exposure to western lifestyles and/or those who have had long transitions through refugee camps, especially those who have been forced to move a second or third time as refugees.

We have clients who have had no formal education at all, through to clients who have had a piecemeal education in a refugee camp, clients who have had formal education in another language, and clients who (thanks to for example remittances from family members in a first world country) have had a good formal education in English. Boys are more likely to have benefited from education than girls.

### *Suggestions*

***The piecemeal education in refugee camps could be improved via an increase in Australian aid for this purpose. This would be of benefit to all refugees rather than just successful applicants for resettlement.***

***For those who are accepted into Australia, each member of the family unit being resettled needs to be assessed on their knowledge, skills and aspirations. This would be the mechanism for developing a pre-settlement package that provides more understandable and realistic information about what lies ahead, as well as providing early skills development in language and living. It could also provide the information for their later settlement needs.***

***These sessions need to begin where people are at and not be generic – one size fits all. Much of what we hear about the existing sessions prior to Australian settlement run as part of the Australian Cultural Orientation, seems to be about the novelty aspects of Australian life like the dangers - snakes, sharks and spiders. The main areas we envisage would be around language development, Australian systems and life skills for Australia. If possible some assessment of the refugee’s progress and/or learning styles should be recorded prior to embarkation, as part of their future settlement package.***

***Another aspect of the orientation would be to inform families of the changes in familial roles that may occur when they arrive in a new country. eg: women going to school or working, men not being able to work and support their family as they did previously. Families also need assistance with managing these changes.***

***The dynamics that have existed in their own culture can be challenged due to changing roles and responsibilities and this can impact upon the positive settlement of families.***

***This information should be delivered as part of the future settlement package run in refugee camps before families come to Australia and then repeated and explored more after arrival.***

***Sessions should include all family members and be appropriately developed for different age cohorts. We would highly recommend special sessions around teenage life and expectations for both the carers and their dependents (12 to 20 year olds). From a human rights perspective we see the importance of beginning the conversation around some of the rights and responsibilities of parents for their children and to include their care, education, health, the law. Similarly young people have to be told in appropriate ways about their rights, and responsibilities in these areas.***

***Combining an improved general education in refugee camps with improved sessions and assessments for those accepted into Australia (funded by an extension of the AUSCO program), would give the next intake a better start and those not accepted more choices in their future life.***

## The Refugee Experience

One of the main issues is stress, as indicated on page 12 of the discussion paper. Even without explicit torture and trauma, the refugee experience can and does cause post traumatic symptoms. If this is not formally identified in the information provided to settlement agencies it can later be a barrier to successful settlement. When you consider major changes in the lives of people as stress factors, the forceful removal of people from their home for whatever reason and their inability to return would rank as a high indicator of stress. We know people show remarkable resilience, and individuals respond differently and have different expectations, but for most newly arrived African Australians there are overt or suppressed stresses that may later become barriers.

There are many factors in refugee life that impinge on the well being of these families. There is often no certainty around basic needs such as shelter, food and water. This is compounded by the other unknowns and changes people live with, such as missing relatives, changing roles within family and ethnic groups. All the above begin changing the cultures.

For example life as a refugee regardless of location is unstable. Many of our young clients have only known this life and do not have a full understanding of their culture as it was/is practiced in their family’s country of origin. The roles of family members have also changed in these situations as families use their skills and resources to survive. We hear stories of males being kidnapped or leaving refugee camps in an effort to find work, of women trying to feed their families, by either growing some food or trying to run a small business, and of even young children taking on extensive carer roles. Many family units are already under threat of disintegration prior to arrival. These family roles are likely to change quickly again once the family reach Australia. For example our systems place a high importance on mothers as carers - Centrelink payments to women; women’s rights to make decisions; and the rights of children.

### Suggestions

***Refugees need to be forewarned. As said above good information and education sessions are crucial. Counselling should also begin once a refugee is accepted as we know that there will be huge and new stresses on families upon their arrival in Australia. Refugees need prior understanding about the added stress of resettlement and some of the ups and downs they may experience. They also need information in general about services in Australia that will assist them through the hard times. This should be expressed in sense of their well being and not as an illness.***

## Role of UN and Australian Government.

The UNHCR and IOM have processes and make decisions, which may later create unintended complications for family members. To illustrate this here are some examples.

The recording of information about family structures and histories (and explaining to refugees its later importance) may not be done as thoroughly as could be in tendering resettlement applications and this may hinder family reunification, which can be crucial later for families. Much of the recording is done by third parties who may not have the required skills to prepare these documents and statements. A simple example is the recording of ages of children. It is often obvious on their arrival that this information is flawed. Even more problematic are stories of flight from a homeland. There is also a reliance on people’s memories of events, which were not recorded at the time and may span two decades.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONA client is trying to sponsor her two eldest children who 20 years ago were living with their grandparents when war broke out. She had heard back at the time that the children were killed. Later through the Red Cross they were located. Having survived they fled to two different countries before finding each other and even later finding that their surviving family members are now in Australia. These two siblings were not listed on the original application as no one asked for this information, and from the family’s perspective they were dead. Now to sponsor these young adults it is problematic and stressful and usually involves additional costs like DNA testing.  |

### Suggestions

***Family reunification processes need to be better included into all parts of resettlement, even at this early application phase. More work needs to go into ensuring better records are put into the primary documents as inconsistency can cause huge problems later when reunification has begun.***

***As these records are from oral histories the government must also accept more inconsistencies and not negate an application as the primary material has inconsistencies.***

Another issue pre arrival phase is that often the Australian authorities are not notified of relevant changes (living arrangements, partners, etc) that occur between the lodging of the application and departure. During this period, we have had clients who have changed partners or married. The refugees don’t notify the authorities because they believe that it might jeopardise their claim. On arrival the outcomes are often messy and cause much stress to those involved. We do not know what the outcome would have been if they had chosen to notify the authority. We deal with those who have lied by omission and who have limited understanding of what this might mean for them on their arrival. We do know that it can be a real barrier to full participation once they arrive.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATION A young unaccompanied minor arrived with her siblings on a Visa 204 and found that she was pregnant. The family unit split on arrival leaving this minor with her 19 year old sister who had a child. It became apparent that the principal applicant withheld information from the government about my client’s recent marriage to the father of her child. Neither young woman was the principal applicant, nor did they have input into the process. It was done by an older relative, whom for cultural reasons, they could not challenge. The minor was informed by migration lawyers that she would have to wait five years to sponsor her partner, the child’s father, during which time her baby would be fatherless. The young women did not understand any aspects of the application or acceptance process and when leaving Africa their first consideration was to get to a safe place and not cause any disruption for the other members of their family on this application. Our client expected that in a civilised country these issues would be resolved.  |

As shown above, on a moral basis it is a violation of a child’s right to not meet their father and for a family to be unnecessarily separated. There is the legal position that the woman is seen as lying as there is an assumption that she knew she was accepted by Australia as a woman at risk, without a man to protect her, but five years separation is still a severe punishment that can cause depression and increases the risk factors for her child.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATION One of our client families came as a unit, which included two UHRMs and it was only after a few months it became apparent the couple were no longer together but forced to be together because of their original application. By the time the application was approved, the woman was in a new relationship in Africa and had to leave her partner. She had also been looking after her sister’s children after her sister’s untimely and unexpected death. She not only left her partner but these children. This family came from a village background with limited skills for navigating government systems. Other stories we hear are that family members are located just as a family are ready to embark and cannot be added to the application without slowing the whole process down. Our experience is the family leave and once here try to organise sponsorship for their located family members. |
| ILLUSTRATIONA young man arrived in Australia when he was 17 and he had no knowledge of his parents’ whereabouts. When he located his father in Africa he had to rush to apply to sponsor him prior to turning 18. He had little time to gather the necessary information, such as the story of how they became separated, and details of his father’s age. Nor could he guarantee that it was consistent with the original application because he was asked to leave the room during the interview in Africa.  |

These stories all lead to stress for individuals and family units prior to or after arrival.

### *More Suggestions*

 ***Again we go back to better information for those planning to come, including understanding fully how the system views changed circumstances, so that those who then choose to go ahead with the migration even when there are changes to their circumstances have a better understanding of the ramifications of that decision. They are not left in some limbo or told it will be OK once they arrive in Australia and find that the situation for reunification is unlikely, expensive and/or years away.***

***We also believe that there should be more discretionary decision making around some of these rules especially for minors (who have no decision making power) and those who were not the principal applicant. In the first story the principal applicant was the only one fully versed in English and therefore it is likely most of the information would be passed through her with no guarantee that the others knew what was agreed to in the process. It is important that the government upon accepting a family unit ensure all adult or near adult members are given the same and full information as it impacts on them all.***

***Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors should not be held accountable for information given or omitted about their parents thereby affecting the opportunity to be reunited with family. Also there should be some flexibility in the period for a minor to apply for parents. Often the carer has their own family and children to bring to Australia and the competing needs may not prioritized in favour of a child without parents in Australia. This is a difficult decision as all members are dealing with their own sense of loss.***

***A minor with a Visa 202 has only five years in which they can sponsor their parents and siblings. This time may lapse due to their young age, lack of knowledge of systems, and/or their reliance on their carer etc.***

### *Consulting refugees prior to Arrival in Australia*

Some of the suggestions described above such as better assessment of refugee needs so that targeted and informative session for those who have been accepted, would be an ideal platform for garnishing input from those who are about to become permanent residents of Australia. To prepare these sessions in a responsive way would include more assessment of the individual educational and social needs as well as their strengths and aspirations. This material should be recorded too for further use by settlement agencies and education institutions in Australia. We see this material as part of a changing story that will require additional assessments as the African Australian proceeds through settlement and further develops their knowledge and skills for life in Australia.

# PART TWO: HONEYMOON PHASE

Regardless of what families or individuals are leaving behind in Africa, a newly arrived group is usually full of eager anticipation and keenness to embrace their new country. There is a period of hope and appreciation of their new life. The literature talks of this phase lasting for about six months. This too is the period when IHSS settlement services are assisting with most day by day problem solving.

Above we have identified some circumstances that may hinder the experience of those newly arrived during this expected honeymoon phase, such as those who are already suffering from stress or find that they cannot be united with family members for extended times. There are also those for example who on arrival are suffering major health problems that require intensive and extended treatment. Below we will look at overall barriers and suggestions as well as some specific areas that relate to your discussion paper such as education, health and housing and primarily with a focus on youth.

## The right information and the right understanding at the right time

A key issue for all newly arrived is that there is too much information given in a short period without clients having a framework to understand some of it, particularly for those who have come from rural backgrounds.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONIt is a common occurrence to arrive at a client’s house and be given everything that has arrived in the mail box. The families are unsure of what needs action and also how to prioritise and discard. So everything is kept, this is incredibly overwhelming for families and also means that important information can be missed. |

For all aspects of living in Australia there are laws and rules governing life. Even for those of us who have grown up in this society many of the systems are complicated and not intuitive. Anyone who has had extensive dealing with Centrelink, Medicare, and the ATO, and basic service providers such as energy and phone companies would realise the complexity of our systems. The expectations of many staff in these and other institutions that newly arrived African Australians will correctly follow the Australian ways are unrealistic and unhelpful. Our clients need to know more than the steps required to comply with the rules of these organisations. They need to understand that they are dealing with a bureaucracy that is bound by rules, time-driven and not corrupt. Some have little experience with bureaucracy of any kind, and for others the bureaucracy was corruptible. For example, someone from a country where birthdates have a little inbuilt uncertainty, must find it odd that applying one day after the 18th birthday is one day too late.

Our clients need also to understand that their long term future in Australia requires them to become more self-reliant. They need to navigate these systems by themselves. This takes time to learn.

Assistance needs to be given both on an individual and group level. Our earlier suggestion of beginning to build frameworks for understanding and the sharing of information is a good platform for this phase.

For most of us we have to hear something more than once to understand let alone remember, and yet we hear people say of African Australians that they should know as they were told or agreed to that when they arrived.

We recognise that the settlement agencies are developing new and better ways to settle all newly arrived African Australians and many such agencies including ACCES Services in Logan have started doing some of what we describe below especially with regards to group sessions and educating youth on life skills in Australia.

Our concern is that there is not enough funding to provide more individualised sessions or groups of people with similar needs having a rolled out program over longer periods so that learning is consolidated and tied in more practical ways to the arrivals’ on-going experiences in Australia. We have to try to find a path between expecting those newly arrived to know something because they were told it in week 2 and learning the hard way such as when they innocently break the law (say by driving an unregistered vehicle). From our experience with young people we know this is not easy and we often have the luxury of working for longer periods with our clients than other agencies.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONThrough my work with refugee families I have noticed that quite a few young people (either our clients or young carers) do not know what they want to do with their life, and more important: what possibilities they are offered to decide for their future. Upon arrival in Australia, they are orientated either towards High School or towards TAFE. For a number of families, “going to TAFE” does not sound so good, and they are expecting poorer education skills from this institution. For some students, they do not even have the choice in where they go: given their age, they cannot be enrolled in High School and TAFE is the only way.  |

**The above illustrates the point that** we see too many young people mainstreamed into the education system far too soon. This is not consistent with the individual educational support plans that children and youth should have. This raises the question: **how do we empower African Australian students** in order to enable them to make their own choices? These choices should be based on their own aspirations and not only on the educational assessment made upon arrival. An empowered young person can overcome the educational barriers raised during the first assessment. Many of the young people we work with do not realise they have the choice and expect professionals to make decisions for them regarding educational/training opportunities.

### *Suggestions*

### Knowledge and skills for the transition into education or the work force

 ***We suggest upon arrival the settlement agencies do not use a one system fits all but continue our earlier suggested strategy for pre-arrivals of on-going more targeted and informative sessions, it would help the newly arrived African Australians get a better understanding of how bureaucratic systems operate and what knowledge and skills they specifically require to function more easily. This would be enhanced too if the settlement or support agencies ran series of practical information sessions on a regular basis on topics such as on income and finance, the law, the housing system, education and employment, health. These sessions too need to be developed for different learners.***

***Attendance may be to the same sessions more than once to consolidation the learning especially over a period so that the on-going life experiences in Australia of the newly arrived are being built into the learning. This would require adult learning principals adapted if possible to a variety of learning styles.***

***Money budgeting is critical at this stage. Families feel wealthy on first arrival, but quickly find because of the high living costs, Centrelink payments are basic for the expected lifestyle in Australia. Much family conflict is about the use of money. The newly arrived are often also taking on responsibility for family members in Africa. We will talk further about this below in Section 7.***

***From our experience we find that many of the current information sessions are for adult members of the family unit. We strongly support the need for sessions for the different age groups so that all family members have appropriate information. It is not good enough to expect the adults to teach the younger members. From our work we see little effort put into the settlement of adolescents and older young people in the 12 to 20 age unless they arrive alone. Many of the issues experienced by the minors we work with stem from lack of good information. This lack contributes too many misunderstandings; misinformation and can cause conflict within family units.***

### Transitional integration into a more appropriate formal education

***As young people grow they are being prepared for independence, and in some African cultures young people are considered to be adults much younger than in Australia, yet they are not treated as such upon arrival. These young people need the right information to assist them to continue this journey into adulthood, and should have time to make an informed decision on the best education option for them: (Q2.11)***

* ***Capacity building and self-confidence (for decision-making, talking in public etc.)***
* ***Identification of skills and their professional developments***
* ***Relevant information on educational pathways and achievements’ opportunities***
* ***Cross-cultural analysis of social and professional behaviours (developing tools for job search and job interview in a culture different from the young people’s)***
* ***Case by case tutoring***

***We anticipate that these transitional sessions might take place with a Milpera-like school – see section 5 below.***

## Education

In this section we touch on formal education as opposed to the information sessions described above. Education is often the key to successful settlement. Most newly arrived African Australians are school age or late teens and few of the adult population have recognised formal qualifications and need additional studies. For example nurses from Africa have not worked with the range of technologies, treatments and drugs available here.

Our primary focus is on children and youth. For these our concerns are how people hear about the education systems and what is offered. The settlement agencies and education system seems to move towards directing young people to certain courses, instead of informing and giving choices and opportunities that are offered to others in our society.

 However, newly arrived families often have unrealistic expectations of the education system and although their dreams are supported on one level ,the system itself can shatter them as these young people are often set up to fail in the mainstream . They do not have the opportunity to graduate with their peers, but begin their studies believing they will. These broken dreams and resulting sense of failure may limit their future employment opportunities.

Along with literacy and numeracy, there is the whole social side of school and fitting in and being normal are important for children. The holistic wellbeing that can be gained or destroyed in school is important as it is what helps build the individuals self esteem and self confidence. These are big contributors to successful settlement.

Theeducation system is so focused on academic achievements and forgets that these young people have other issues to deal with. This is not only related to trauma, but to coming to a new country and finding out how things work here.

### *Suggestions*

### An “improved” Milpera as a model

***If there was a place like Milpera SHS in Brisbane for all young people to go to on arrival to empower them, and help them to make a better transition to formal education or the work force. This is a place to learn how we learn in Australia as well as more concrete sessions on language, literature and numeracy. They also run life skills programs based on relationships, respect for those from different cultures and conflict resolution.***

***Milpera uses a variety of group based activities, which develop the skills required by young people to make choices in their own lives. These group based activities impact on many areas of young people’s lives, including breaking down social isolation, by connecting them with people from other backgrounds.***

***For those who have had limited or no previous education there should be a Milpera type education system running for many years, but once the basic skills are learnt, paralleling as much as possible the mainstream system, with a focus on keeping the students learning by achieving and not being seen as failures.***

***This type of system may have a bigger focus on employment for the older children, who desire this, and on possible integration into the school system for younger ones. This type of system would be ideal for children from about 10 years old and covering the older teenagers who currently want to attend school but because of their age are pushed into TAFE courses. (We recognize the great work happening in TAFE particularly in the new Youth Programs – but currently these do not have the capacity to provide the necessary individualized and nurturing environment as we see at MIlpera).***

***Over the past years we have seen less money going into ESL teaching in Queensland. We would like to see a strong commitment on both levels of governments (and even supported by local government) for assisting newly arrived African Australians learn. The types of system described above are not cheap but do produce positive outcomes that are likely to mean future savings in other areas such as, Centrelink payments, juvenile justice or mental health.***

***Other suggestions***

***The mainstream Education system needs to be more open and start embracing African Australians and other refugees coming into the school system, not just leaving the responsibility to specialised schools or specialised areas within school. Every child has a right to an education and all schools have a responsibility to deliver education that is appropriate for the children attending.***

***Schools can look at how they create a multicultural environment by having children from different cultures learning about and from each other. Not just showcasing different cultures, but supporting Australian children and others to embrace and experience different cultures. This can easily be adapted into curriculum in many areas.***

***We also support tutoring and mentoring for individuals as the only volunteers we can tap into either operate as homework clubs where the more able tend to know how to make the most of the tuition, or well meaning family tutors (volunteers) but not always the most skilled at this task. (Again we value these existing systems for many reasons, including the socializing and the contact with mainstream Australians, which help with other aspects of settlement too). But there should be opportunities for individuals to get intensive tutoring also, as some young people miss out.***

***More recently we have heard that one high school in Logan runs a homework club that allows parents to attend. This is a great idea as it takes away concerns of parents about where their children go as well as assisting the parents to get help with their learning as many are TAFE students also.***

***School holidays should include some voluntary participation in learning opportunities such as Milpera has run over the Christmas break. Our clients continually complain about the long holidays and are eager to spend this time in a learning environment. This may include holiday based programs for all ages, which may just be social, but increase the capacity to continue English classes when formal school is not available.***

### *Suggestions for educators (Q2.12)*

***Educators should have compulsory, not enthusiasm driven training, which shows or assists teachers to work with complex African Australian situations.***

***There is also a need to involve the whole family in the education of youth and children in a supportive way as often the carers are unaware or unable to begin this involvement. This may happen through multicultural events where the families share their culture by for example preparing their food, talking (even through an interpreter) about the changes they found when they arrived, classes on hair braiding or drumming . A creative teacher can develop a range of interactive sessions involving newly arrived African Australian adults and children that fit well into the school curriculum.***

***One small Catholic school in Moorooka has run a play group and cooking classes that have successfully involved Africans and the wider community, but mostly from their own multicultural school community. These initiatives need to be built upon.***

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATION I asked one carer why she did not go to a parent teacher interview and she said she would not understand what they are saying. The children in her family unit were learning English much faster than she was and this put her at a disadvantage. It is also embarrassing for some to have to ask their children in public what is said. |

***In this early phase it is important for schools and educators to use interpreters to enhance and encourage this full family involvement and thereby develop better understanding of what is expected of carers and what rights the family have.***

As education systems do not provide the same level of information to our client group as to other members of the school community and this may be seen as discriminatory. Sometimes this may be seen by schools as families not being interested in their children’s education, where this judgment is based on assumptions.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONS We have had two primary aged students who were assessed for intellectual impairment, the schools did not engage the parents well and the parents did not understand. In one case the school asked us, a community based organization, to tell the parents of the outcome of assessment.Sometimes these assessments are done for the best intention as there seems to be more resources available to a child with a disability as opposed to one who is unable to understand the language or the Australian ways. One father reported that the teacher told him his son had to go to a particular school even though he said he did not want him to go there.Schools do not always use interpreters, which means the students and parents are not afforded the right to being able to communicate with the school and fulfil their obligation as parents to participate in their child’s education.Children from Africa often perform at events in song and dance and yet in primary schools few are selected for the school band. The ways of assessing students for band are westernized and discriminate against other cultures. |

## Few Opportunities to be Included in the Wider Australian Community

Another characteristic of the honeymoon phase is that there is limited contact with the broader Australian community. During the first six months the newly arrived African Australians are busy and do not meet many mainstream families and are often surrounded by other newly arrived refugees and by agency people, such as from the settlement agencies, the health professionals and educators.

This has a number of consequences as they often make assumptions about family life here, based on their neighbourhoods. We are often told that their children are becoming disrespectful to their elders and that they roam the streets at nightlike Australian children. This is not how we see our own society, but the newly arrived are reflecting life in their new communities. Most are now housed in disadvantaged communities that are struggling with many of their own social and economic issues.

Our client minors tell us stories about the children at their school being rude or violent to each other, and disrespectful to their teachers. In these early days they see this as wrong, but for a few, once they are struggling in the system we are told they are using the same behaviours within their groups and classes.

Housing is the concern. It is so costly that the newly arrived are more likely to be in the outskirts of our city and in low socio economic communities. Their first home is organised for them as part of settlement and they usually stay there for the first six months or longer. We will return to the topic of housing in section 9 of this report as like many support agencies and workers, we are finding housing one of the most stressful and time consuming aspect of settlement.

### *Suggestions around inclusion of newly arrived*

***Settlement agencies try to organise volunteers to assist with family settlement. In the past there have been small community groups actively involved in this type of work, but this seems to be less prevalent as volunteers are harder to find. Some churches play a role and certainly for primary aged children they are more exposed to the wider community. For example school children need to be assessed for music in a way that allows African Australian children to develop their various musical talents. School bands and choirs are a good way to include the children in the school community and through school performances their carers and extended families too may join this and the wider community.***

***We think more Government community grants should be directed to projects that enhance aspects of cross cultural activities that have key outcomes based on social inclusion.*  *These could be used for example to facilitate cultural events where children from other cultures teach Australian born children their ways. There might be workshops run on performing dances or ceremonies of welcome or how to dress and behave in traditional ways for different events.***

***Newly arrived minors need special grants to pay for sporting registrations to mainstream sports clubs, such as netball and soccer, as they are excluded because of the costs. This is a great way to join a community and for the community to recognise the skills of these young people. It builds a broader appreciation from both sides.***

***Like schools and sporting groups, churches play a big role in social inclusion for newly arrived. In the past small grants were offered to church and other community groups to facilitate inclusion, but we see little evidence of that now.***

***In presenting our ideas we also identify contradictions in it. For example our ideas above on running a parallel learning system may be seen as contradicting suggestions put up on social inclusion. We recognize these difficulties and suggest in this case that the parallel education system builds in opportunities for broader inclusion such as involvement in cultural and sporting events on a regular basis.***

## Managing Money

In the early days of settlement most families argue about money **or the lack of it.** Budgeting in a new country is very stressful, as it is difficult to understand both the Centrelink income system as well as the types of expenditure one is responsible for during this period. It is a steep learning curve with other dimensions that most Australians do not have to deal with.

Remittances back to Africa are likely to cause financial stress on family life. It also causes intergenerational stress as children and young people are beginning to feel neglected as any “spare” money is sent back to struggling family member in Africa. The young are also developing new desires, based on advertising and on what other children or families may have. They want it now and often tell their families that they need items which many of us would see as optional or items to be earned.

As for most children they like to expand their boundaries as much as possible. They want to have freedoms that they have not had previously. The argument they often give their family is that this is normal in Australia – a must have – like a mobile phone, special clothes and runners etc. They begin equating this to being cared for by their family and forget the huge sacrifices their families have made in getting them here safely.

The other complaint we hear is from carers about the children 16 years and older getting their own money from Centrelink. We have been told that this money is destroying their family. Depending upon the family this money is used in many ways. For some it may be resumed into the family budgeting with the youth getting none or some for their own use. In extreme cases the youth keeps all the money for personal use, but expects the family to still care for them.

### *Suggestion*

***A compulsory part of the settlement package for all 12 years old children to adults must be about Centrelink payments, the receiver’s rights and responsibilities as well as full information on living costs in Australia. Knowing their responsibilities as carers, families can learn to budget in a way that would reflect what the money is intended for and perhaps allow for some small saving or small regular payments to family overseas. This would reduce the risk of debts, such as rent arrears, power disconnections, or children missing out on school activities. There has to be clear messages that the money the carer gets, is not the young people’s money, but provided for the adults to look after them and what it is used for, therefore providing insight as to what young people will need to contribute when they do get their own money.***

## Health

 There are some excellent health services for refugees in Queensland.

A number of families arrive with immediate health concerns on top of the usual regime of immunisations, coughs and colds. Most families are linked to a local GP who is experienced with newly arrived refugees. This has benefits as they have a commitment to good information and are more aware of health problems that are endemic in Africa. Many we have worked alongside routinely use interpreter services in the early days of settlement, and dispense with them as language develops and the relationship between patient and doctor grows.

For others this is not the case and they will not go to the doctor when they need to as they find it difficult to communicate. This may lead to further health problems.

There are some great Programs in the community which are leaders in health care for African Australians such as the Logan Refugee Clinic in Queensland (relates to Q 3.2).

An issue of concern is around the health of young African Australians. The youth are not informed about their right to confidentiality when seeing a doctor. This is particularly important for young women. Many agencies are concerned about the increase of unplanned and unwanted pregnancies.

Some medical staff make assumptions relating to an African Australian, based on their belief that all their ills relate to their refugee history or trauma.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONA young carer arrived with a 5 year old child who did not speak. Extensive tests were made, an assessment reached that showed he was intellectually disabled and he was referred to a special school. His mother did not understand the prognosis for her son even after attending many sessions with an interpreter. |

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONChange to appointments is unavoidable, but often families get letters and calls in English and they are unsure what appointments to keep and not to go to and turn up for the wrong ones. This resulted in a Child Safety notification on one of my carers as she did not keep her appointments for her baby. She attended others that had been cancelled or changed times to be turned away after travelling on public transport for quite some time with a small child.  |

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONOne carer who had poor English refused to use an on-site interpreter as he felt unsafe even in Australia. To ensure he understood important information I used phone interpreters. The client would not proceed until he had some background information about the interpreter and this was not well received by some of the interpreters. |

### *Suggestion (relates to Q 3.4, Q 3.13 and Q 3.18)*

***There needs to be better information for youth about access to health services, and their rights to confidentiality.***

 ***The use of interpreters for important health discussions needs to be compulsory and be done by experienced interpreters. The interpreters need good training.***

***Any written communication from the hospital should be followed up by a telephone call using an interpreter, especially if it relates to a change of appointment time. Our clients receive many letters and we find them confusing, especially if a client is seeing more than one service within a hospital. The standard letters always ask for the client to bring X-rays, blood test result etc when they have no idea what this might involve. In summary, letters to African Australians who are listed as requiring an interpreter should be clear appropriate letters with no unnecessary information and be followed up by a phone call with an interpreter.***

***As some clients come from small ethnic groups, it is critical that the interpreter respects confidentiality of patients, particularly for young men and women. The interpreters have to understand that some clients do not immediately trust interpreters.***

***Similarly users of interpreters need some training in how to use them effectively. For example we observe some doctors talking to the interpreter or to the support person rather than the actual patient.***

### *Consulting refugees during the honeymoon phase in Australia*

Currently most consultations are done with elders of the various ethnic groups comprising African Australians. Most have had a longer time in Australia and are predominantly male. Females make up more than half of these adult populations and many households are female headed.

We recognise that some African ethnic groups do have structures that allow for representation of women, yet their voices may still not be heard on the broader community level. As said above many of the women are busy with education, the family’s life and have less time than male representatives who have women at home supporting them. There are also in some African traditional communities, authorities that allow men the right to publicly represent their community views. Women need to understand that they have new rights in Australia and be skilled up to use these rights.

We believe the best way to get a more representative voice from these communities during this phase is through the education systems as now most newly arrived African Australians attend some learning institution for this period. The other idea we have is that if settlement or allied support organisations ran the types of informative and educative workshops as outlined above these too could be tapped for better consultations and would also involve capturing the opinions and ideas of the youth.

Maybe stay at home mums could be consulted via Centrelink during interviews as they too have different needs and ideas and may be out of the educational systems for these early years.

# PART THREE: SIX MONTHS TO TWO YEARS

The settlement agencies under the IHSS finish with families after about six months. For those African Australians who have good supports within their own or the wider community and/or have understood the systems or at least understood how they can find out information as required, are well placed to set goals and achieve positive settlement. There are a variety of reasons why this may not happen during this second phase of living in Australia. In this section we will focus on housing, training and employment.

## Housing

Housing is the biggest struggle after the initial settlement period. Every one of our workers who responded to the paper wrote mostly about housing as the major barrier. This is not surprising as it is the crux to better settlement. For example it impacts among other things, on the family income (not just high rent but also transport costs), on availability to services and to the potential for social inclusion. In the earlier section we also looked at the impact of being housed in low social economic communities as it may give the newly arrived negative perceptions of Australian ways.

After six months in Australia, most families are still totally reliant on Centrelink payments so that their family income is low, even with rent assistance. At this time most are assisted by their original housing agency to either secure their first home for a longer period or find an alternative. Sometimes their family or community assists with this progression.

Below is our response, which partly answers your questions on housing experiences for African Australians in Section 4. Many of the questions highlighted in the discussion paper are interlinked so we have written a general response that also addresses some of the specific questions raised.

The demand for low cost housing in Queensland exceeds the supply so that median rents continue to rise. With the economic downturn our clients on low incomes are competing against more and more working people, including professionals, who are struggling in the current economic climate or may be saving for a house deposit.

Overall, a key driver for the family’s first move is often to find a home that costs less or equal to the current rent. Rents have usually increased over the past six months so for this to happen, the families move further away from services or take inappropriate housing (too few rooms or a house in poor repair).

There is an assumption that the family will be successful in finding a place, but we have found this problematic. The newly arrived African Australians face many barriers other than low incomes and may include: limited or poor rental histories, lack of understanding of the housing system, discrimination and large family sizes. These are explored below.

### Limited or poor Rental Histories (relates to Q4.6)

After six months African Australians have only the rental history of their first place which is usually managed directly by a community housing agency. Even with the additional positive information provided by support agencies who have worked extensively with the family over this first rental period, these rental histories and written references may not be enough to satisfy a real estate agent.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONMy client was not placed on the original tenancy agreement because he was a minor. When he left the family he had no rental record although he has been paying a high percentage of his income in rent and had not generated any rent arrears himself as he was assisted to set up the correct regular payments. Even though his contribution was correct it happened that those on the tenancy agreement generated debts. He too would by default have a poor rental history if he stated he was a resident at that time. |

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATION (Q.9)One young man and his two siblings could not find anything due to the age, income and rental record, yet he is expected to care for his siblings.Recently one of the families I work with had trouble gaining further accommodation after being evicted. The reasons for facing eviction were valid, but would have been preventable if the young people understood the systems better.My client was further discriminated against when the original real estate told the new real estate the reasons behind the eviction. These had been relayed by the carer who blamed my young client as the cause of the problem. I have rectified this matter as the story that had been told to the real estate was not true. |

During the first six months of settlement and even with the support of settlement agencies, it is not unknown that families generate big debts and often as shown above for reason outside their understanding. Other debts relate to budgeting difficulties for those in a totally new system. Regardless how or why a debt happens it has implications for everyone on the tenancy agreement.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATION A number of our families generated debts of about $2000 each during their time in a community managed house. In one case the family split within the first three weeks, but no one explained to those who stayed in the organized house that this meant that they needed to make up the missing Centrepay rent payments for the person who had left. In another case one of the contributors to Centrepay decided to withdraw their permission without telling the others in the house. In both cases we assisted the family to clear their rent arrears as we see our role is helping newly arrived to be responsible citizens. But in encouraging the payback of the debt, we realize that we have disadvantaged these two families with regards to their applications for Public Rental housing, as set out in the new assessment procedures. As workers we know more about the housing systems (as do others in the wider community). Should we assist families, who we know are unlikely to have a working member (for example an elderly carer of young children or a chronically ill person) to become homeless so that they have a better chance of obtaining secure, affordable and appropriate government housing? |

### Understanding rental systems (relates to Q 4.11)

As illustrated above another issue is that the newly arrived do not fully understand the housing system or their responsibilities. You might say, but they signed the tenancy agreement and that it has all information listed or they received the required booklet. It is totally foreign to most newly arrived. Not just written in a language they do not know, but much of the content is new. For many African Australians there must be nothing as bizarre as seeing how much care some Australians put into growing a lawn that produces nothing for them but requires additional work and costs, and in renting a property they too are forced to provide a level of care for these lawns and for unproductive gardens.

### Suggestions

***Regarding contracting a rental agreement, some information should be stressed more clearly to the African Australian families, such as:***

* ***The possibilities for the landlord to increase the rent every six months***
* ***The possibility to discuss with the Real Estate before accepting or rejecting some of the proposed changes in the rental agreement, and how it may end in an agreed changed.***
* ***The impact of the current tenancy on the future tenancies (tenancy records)***
* ***What is a neighbour, how and why the family may enter in contact with the neighbours, and what kind of relationships may be developed with the neighbourhood?***
* ***The services the African Australians may contact to get more information on tenants’ rights and responsibilities.***

***We know that some excellent and innovative initiatives have begun in Queensland especially with educating African Australians to be tenancy advisors and a few have been employed in TAASQ services and in Multicultural agencies. This does need to be extended and some ideas are below.***

 *As said above in Part two, during their early stay African Australians need to be assisted in learning how to keep a house and how to be a responsible tenant. This should be covered during the first six months, but may take longer for some.*

***People should be shown how to keep a garden and that a lawn mower should be provided or African communities should be assisted to set up co-ops or businesses to assist each other with yard maintenance.***

***Firstly in my opinion a specific program should be developed to inform the African Australian, Australians or other CALD individuals about their rights and responsibilities. This program would be based on a series of workshops running through a six-month period with a minimum of one workshop a month. The program should not be run in one office but instead, it should be provided in the neighbourhood, either in one house or in a public place (library, park?). This program should include CALD families and Australian families in order to raise cultural awareness and understanding. This would overcome many prejudices.***

***Secondly the settlement services should spend more time talking to African Australians about their rights and responsibilities, and do so more often. From what I know, the settlement services talk about these issues only during the first six-months after the Refugee’s arrival in the country (under IHSS). Most of the time, the refugee is overwhelmed with a lot of information and loses his/her ability to connect with more information. The settlement services should include information session groups Settlement Grant Program (SGP). However these services shall need more resources to be able to contact refugee families by going in the neighbourhood and invite them to attend.***

***Thirdly, Africans Australians shall be given the possibilities to access interpreting services without bearing the cost, in order to communicate effectively with the Real Estate. The easiest and non-discriminatory way to provide it, in my opinion, would be to enable Tenant Advices Services to access interpreting services at no costs (thus they would be able to provide these services to any CALD individual and not only African Australians).(relates to Q 4.11)***

***Possibly too the courses outlined above could be accredited so that a certificate is generated that might be used as part of the potential tenants’ references in future applications.***

### Large families

Another major barrier is the size of some of the families. A number of our African Australian families number over 8 people so even if applying for a four bedroom house it is unlikely they will be successful if they are competing against smaller families. This can be compounded by the sponsoring process where a family assists other family members or complete families to come to Australia. Sometimes more than one family is housed together.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONTo comply with the tenancy agreements some families are forced to rent two houses. A number of our families and extended families live in two or three houses in the community. They try to stay within a suburb, but in the current housing shortage this may not be possible. |

### *Suggestion*

***The Government needs to build large family based houses for African Australians (and other larger newly arrived families), that take in consideration cultural requirements. The model can be like that used for Indigenous communities where the communities were consulted and the government has designed and built places that address the cultural needs identified.***

### Discrimination

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATION One of the African families I work with received legal notice to leave the house as required by the landlord. The official reason was the end of the lease period. The unofficial reasons (not stated in the legal notice) were that they had damaged the house and more people than those listed on the lease were living in the house. Regarding the first argument, the agent made reference to a new stove which was not working two weeks after the family started using it. A notification for repair was made to the Real Estate but nobody came to fix it. After the required date for leaving the house, as the family had found no other place to move, the Real Estate eventually sent somebody for repair and it was found that an electrical failure (manufacture defect) was preventing the stove from working and there was not link between the family use of the stove and the defect. Consequently the Real Estate softened its position and allowed the family to stay in the house (without starting a judicial process) until they eventually find a new place to live.On the second count, the family was receiving daily visits from friends or relatives which made the house quite crowded during the day, but these persons were not living in the house and were out by the evening. No evidence has ever been provided by the Real Estate to substantiate their allegations. |

Relates to Q 4.10

In the story above, the family benefited as one of the family members has good English, is well-educated about the tenant’s rights and knows how to seek legal support. Consequently he stood up to the Real Estate to contest the false allegations and prevent homelessness. What would happen if the family did not have this support? I presume there would have been a forced eviction, resulting in homelessness and difficulties to find a new house because of bad tenancy records.

### *Suggestion relating to Q 4.11*

***All newly arrived African Australians require assistance to translate tenancy agreements, not just the words; they need someone to provide a clear explanation of what the words mean.***

### Nomadic youth and Homelessness

In response to 4 3. With the stretching of the boundaries by the youth we are seeing more leaving home and living a nomadic life, but usually within their ethnic community. A few because of severe family conflict or violence and been housed in community based accommodation, one of our ex unaccompanied minors at 18 used a mainstream men’s shelter. A few have moved in with members of other ethnic communities. We find it the exception that they leave their own community.

In working with African Australian families we also see older single people and even married ones who have separated recently living for short stays with other community families. This generous hospitality provides a safety net for many, but like any safety net if it is abused it will not function when it is really needed.

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONA young 15 year old woman left her carer and after travelling interstate with a friend for a few weeks, moved in with another family from her community. This did not work and within six months she lived in four different households and began skipping weeks at a time from school as she lived further and further from it. Not surprisingly she was reported as not progressing well at school and at 16 we heard that she had an unplanned pregnancy.We have seen other young women living in unsecured rooms under houses and where many young men visit regularly. |

As said above the young often want all the money provided by Centrelink for their own use and to afford this they move from house to house. This lifestyle is also about the young expanding their boundaries and living what we would consider risky lives. They assume a level of safety in the Australian society that we would not accept. For many there is no significant person who is aware of their location or worries if they do not turn up when expected. We have seen 15 and 16 year old young men and women travelling interstate without family support. Living on the goodwill of friends is often short-lived because of the financial costs and threats to the hosts’ tenancies as they become overcrowded, so we see these young people moving regularly.

Overall this behaviour is problematic as the young people enjoy this freedom, but begins to find it difficult to live with routine and within boundaries. Once their relationship to place begins to fail we find that their connections with education institutions breakdown. For many of these young people they need more rather than less education and this self imposed disruption to their studies results in further disadvantaging them in the job market. The other implication is for Centrelink payments as if their school attendance record is monitored some may not only loose their future payments, but also generate debts, which compounds their issues as it makes them more dependent on others and for some more vulnerable. They get into a cycle of homelessness which is difficult to break and is unlikely to be picked up in the usual ways because of the tolerance of members of their community to take some responsibility for them. (Relates to Q 4.11)

### *Suggestions*

***We go back to our earlier comment about the importance of early intervention. These young people need to know their rights and responsibilities before they receive money from the Government. It’s important that they understand that the money is for their basic needs including education expenses and they have to continue attending an educational institution to receive it. It is much more difficult to re-engage youth once they have left the educational system and those disengaged are more likely to get into trouble and have less chance of regular employment.***

***This area needs a fresh approach. It requires more work that just telling the young what is expected. Three main parties are involved: the nomadic youth, their host families and Centrelink. The host families and Centrelink need to respond more quickly to these changing situations so that the consequences for the youths’ behaviour bit earlier, for example no money from Centrelink. Host families need to ensure the youth if they have Centrelink pay their way. We know that their primary concern is for the safety of the youth and they don’t want to see them move into more vulnerable situations and therefore provide a space, but this acceptance does not help the youth learn to play a productive and full life in Australia.***

 ***We don’t want to tell these communities what to do and we know that this type behaviour is a concern for them, but here a couple of ideas.***

***A number of African Communities are established to a level that they may wish to support a transitional house for youth from their community, which provides appropriate life skills for moving back into education or training as well as for responsible independent living.***

***Community members may become support workers in existing youth establishments.***

***These efforts should involve input from those disengaged as ultimately they will decide if the initiative will work.***

### Housing sector support (relates to Q 4.13)

The Government has few levers to regulate the costs of private rents, but through the RTA they have developed a system that provides some safeguards for tenants. Where the Government does have some power to support African Australians is through the social housing system. Unfortunately this system has shrunk over the past 10 years.

The community housing sector in Queensland was always small, but it was the most flexible part of the system for those who struggled in the mainstream housing sector. Last year much of this sector was resumed into the Government rental system. Under the banner of the Social Housing sector, the Government has developed a new housing priority needs system that makes it less likely for many of our clients to be seen as very high priority as they are not homeless or experiencing mental illness.

We need to challenge this new assessment process as it disadvantages those newly arrived who are less likely to have a high household income for decades.

The connection of the public housing and community sector means that many people are on public housing list when they don’t even want public housing i.e.: a young person who may aspire to work and be ineligible for public housing, but is in need of support when they are young. This clogs up the system.

There needs to be the opportunity for other options such as head leasing

* Use of interpreters
* Longer leases availability for security and stability of families
* Cap on rent increases
* Other options for low paid rent – not sure what though

Rent/buy opportunities

 *This project has the objective to look at the issues facing African Australians from a human rights perspective. The article 3 states that everyone has the right to security. I quote Mr. Tom Calma’s words in the foreword of this project: “Many (...) African Australians underwent a refugee experience prior to their arrival in Australia”. These individuals already experienced insecurity and losses. The respect for their dignity shall prevent any kind of services to impose insecurity upon them, and shall impose on services to communicate with them with cultural awareness.*

### *Suggestion*

Consequently I suggest the following:

* ***The RTA should have its form translated in different languages and send the forms to tenants in the appropriate language.***
* ***The government should legislate to put a stop to six-month lease in favour of a minimum twelve-month lease.***
* ***The government should legislate to cap rent increase and to authorize this increase only once a year.***
* ***To support organisations such as M.A.T.C.H. and develop their client focus group to non-refugee individuals, in order to enable African Australians to access private rental markets when they do not have tenancy records***
* ***To develop a specific program towards African Australian relating to buying a house and landlord’ rights and responsibilities.***

***The State Government has to increase the social housing stock and build more appropriate types of housing especially for large families.***

***The new assessment for Social housing has to consider the needs of newly arrived African Australians (and others under the refugee and humanitarian program) and not teach them to fail in the system so that they can be considered as “very high need”.***

### Coordination of services FOR African Australians (relating to Q4.14)

There is often a concern regarding confidentiality to the point it is detrimental to the client and to the relationship between services. Services need to extend their professionalism to each other and ensure they are working well without compromising the confidentiality of the client. ??

## Employment and training needs

Securing meaningful employment has as many meanings as there are those engaged in employment. Employment provides the means for both financial gain and contribution to the overall system in which we live. For it to be meaningful it has to fulfil some value that those doing it put on it. In the early days of settlement where money is so critical African Australians often will accept any work that pays a reasonable wage. They may even choose unsocial hours, as that might be all that’s offered for those with poor English skills and/or may fit with their ongoing studies.

But this same work may not be meaningful in two years time when the African Australian is trained or has better English. (Q 1.3)

If an African Australian wants to work in the medical area, as many do, they may find working at the abattoir meaningless, especially if the time at work is reducing their chance of fulfilling the training for their chosen career.

### *Suggestions*

***We have already stressed that newly arrived need to be taught something about how bureaucracies operate in Australia.***

***It is important that newly arrived know early on what different educational and training pathways are possible for them to pursue their goals but also what employment opportunities there are in Australia as it may be very different from their previous experience. (Q1.4 &5)***

***It is not only about pathways but also showing the newly arrived the connections between our employment, education and income support systems. For example some people do not go to interviews or appointments as they do not want to miss school and they do not understand the financial repercussions that can occur. (Q 1.4&5)***

***We would also recommend that those who are unlikely to get paid employment be exempt from attending employment agencies. For example we work with elderly members of the African Australian community who have poor English and are regularly asked to attend interviews.***

***As said above in Section 8 for hospital appointments, the use of standardized letters is meaningless unless a person knows what is expected of them. (Q1.4&5)***

|  |
| --- |
| ILLUSTRATIONOne young man was to attend an interview with an employment agency on a day he attends school. He did not go so his income was cut off.This happened twice and he did not know that he could ring and change the appointment. He thought it was more important to go to school as he would have his income cut off if his school attendance was poor. |

Some employment services do provide culturally appropriate services to African Australians and some have improved; for example remembering to book an interpreter, while on a first visit this was not seen as necessary. The systems do not allow for individual needs as they are structured around proformas, such standard letters, forms and lists.

Many of our clients see the job agencies as a threat and not as an agency that is there to assist them.

There are also major inconsistencies between agencies and the help that can be gained at different services. We do hear clients say regularly that the services do not find them jobs when they are desperate to get one. The other complaint is being referred to a type of work the client is not able to do or is not interested in doing. (Q1.8&10)

### *Suggestions*

***As we say above the assessment of clients needs to consider where they are at in their development. If they have overseas qualification this should be recognized as the starting point. If additional requirements for the associated job are needed in Australia this should be seen as topping up what is there. The client should not be forced to begin from scratch.* (Q1.11)**

***We believe that unemployment will impact upon these communities as we have seen happen to others. It may result in multiple generations of unemployed, which will have major impacts on the integration of some African Australians into our community.***

***This may have two consequences. The wider community may view this lack of participation by African Australians as them not wanting to work and living off the welfare system , while the Africans may become disillusioned with Australia as the dreams that have been held have not come to fruition. (Q1.13)***

***Many African Australians have different experiences of employment and training based on their religion, age, gender, sexuality or disability (Q1.18). Many of the older grandmothers we assist want to work and they find it increasingly difficult, as their experience of work has often been unpaid. Some have worked in markets selling their own goods, but they do not have the language or skills to run a business in Australia.***

***Some continue to do voluntary work whilst others are getting paid work ahead of them. Employers are happy to keep them on, just not pay them.***

***Young people have been turned away without even being able to leave their resume – it is hard to say if this is the same discrimination that other young people face by employers or more because of being African, but certainly they are treated unfairly and rudely.***

### *Suggestion*

***Training institutions need to ensure that part of what they teach at TAFE is focused on the workers’ rights and responsibilities as well as those of employers as some newly arrived do set up businesses in Australia, and employ members of their own community without recognizing awards etc. Through this training African Australians must be told about types of discrimination in the work place and how they can challenge this if it happens to them with regards to their gender, religion, age, sexuality or disability. (Q 1.17)***

### *Consulting African Australians during the 6 months to 2 year phase in Australia*

This is a more difficult phase as by this time people are beginning to spread out into the wider community. Similar approaches can be used for the last phase as there are groups within the education and training systems.

It is likely that during this phase most African Australians have contact with their different ethnic communities and some may have active roles in the formal structures. These obviously have a place, but again it is important to try to develop mechanisms for hearing from those who are marginalised within their communities or have move away from their ethnic communities, as they too have important experiences of settlement.

# PART FOUR: TWO YEARS ONWARD

By the end of the first two years it becomes easier to identify those who have or will reach full participation. Some key indicators for success are families and individual who:

* are engaged in full time education or employment,
* have an income greater than Centrelink payments,
* have had stable accommodation for over a year,
* are healthy
* have strong social networks of support and engagement and involving a cross section of the wider community
* have set goals for their future in Australia.

On the other side the families and individuals that struggle are those who remain on low households incomes , have poor English, have on-going health concerns including stress related depression, have debts and are unemployable.

For example one group we see struggling are elderly carers of young children who have few family supports, limited education and/or with health concerns, and have more rigid cultural frameworks for parenting. They are unlikely to get work, but still have the same costs (and dependents with the same aspirations of their peers). These are examples of what our group would identify as complex cases. We have many families with unaccompanied refugee minors who are successful, but there are other examples of complex cases within our client group that relate to the nature of their family structure, their previous experience and current issues. Another example is young carers who are looking after their younger siblings or nieces and nephews and without much parenting or life experience themselves.

It is highly unlikely the new DIAC initiative will address these complex cases as it has a model of co-ordinated intensive work with individuals or families for a **short time**. Sometimes part concerns may be referred to Complex Cases, which could assist on one level, but it is unlikely to deal with such big intertwined issues where new knowledge, skills and behaviours have to be learnt to live successfully in Australia.

### *Suggestions*

 ***Families with complex needs are more likely to require intensive work continuously for at least the first two years of settlement. No agency is resourced enough to do this and these families reach out to many different agencies and get a piecemeal response, that rarely alleviate the key issues. We think these families or individuals require coordinated and targeted individualised programs that set out goals and strategies for achieving good outcomes. Evaluations of this work could be used to better tailor all settlement Programs.***

# PART FIVE: CONCLUSION

In conclusion we again thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this dialogue. If time permitted we would have added more around the issues of education, training and employment as we see these, and the area of stress for newly Arrived Africans as fault lines that indicate where more work is required to assist integration of African Australians into the community at large.

We again emphasis the need for early and more intensive assessment of client requirements for settlement and that as much as possible tailor the response to the clients, and not use a broad approach.

We encourage you to build more consultative pathways to those most disadvantaged, such as illiterate elderly and stay at home mothers.