

African Australians

A Report on Human Rights and Social Inclusion Issues

Submission from the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

Office for Justice and Peace and Migrant and Refugee Office

Introduction

The Office for Justice and Peace (OJP) and the Melbourne Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (MCMRO) are agencies of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne.

The OJP and MCMRO provide advice and guidance from a Catholic perspective in response to policy and program issues.

Our agencies are grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission on the settlement experiences of African Australians.

As Catholics, we are guided by the philosophies of the Gospels that have been articulated into principles of Catholic Social Teaching. These include –

Dignity – each human person has an inherent dignity that is inviolable

Solidarity – the human community is connected across cultures, classes, creeds and countries

Social order - must uphold the dignity of the human person

Participation - Individuals and groups should be allowed and assisted to actively participate in society

Preferential option for the Poor - should lead to justice for those who are marginalised

The Common Good - where individuals' rights and needs are respected but are also balanced for the good of all

Subsidiarity affirms the right of individuals and social groups to make their own decisions and accomplish what they can by their own initiative and industry

Purpose of Government - is to promote the Common Good ensuring social justice and equity for all

Prior to the launch of the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) discussion paper on African Australians, our offices were already working with a group of African community leaders to develop a pan-African Christian network that would *give focus and a voice for the different African communities enabling them to meet and address issues* of concern. Many of the issues they had raised were covered by the themes of the discussion paper. Thus, we were particularly interested in preparing this submission.

Methodology

Six community consultations were arranged throughout May and June in areas or parishes that had been identified as having significant populations of African Australians. These included Preston, Noble Park, Footscray, Werribee, St Albans South and Fitzroy. This list is by no means exhaustive but given the time constraints we could not conduct consultations in Dandenong, Melton and even in regional areas, such as Castlemaine and Shepparton. Approximately 70 people participated in the community consultations. A set of questions (see Appendix A) were formulated to stimulate discussion at the community consultations.

The following are many of the common concerns raised by participants at the various consultations. They are clustered under the areas of concern listed in the discussion paper.

Education

English Language Classes

Learning English is the key that unlocks opportunities in education, training and employment. It also makes accessing housing, health and other services easier; and, with well-targeted information sessions, can help prevent misunderstandings and serious breaches of the law.

It is imperative to provide appropriate English classes that will unlock the potential of each refugee and humanitarian entrant so that they can reach their full potential and eventually settle successfully in Australia. This does not mean that every refugee and migrant needs to be able to deconstruct complex sentences and identify obscure aspects of grammar. It means that every new arrival should eventually attain a level of English that allows them to function effectively in Australian society.

For children, this means a level of English that will allow them to participate in mainstream schooling.

For men and women, it means a level of English that will help them find work, be able to take instruction and understand information; be able to negotiate with real estate agents and generally understand conversations with service providers, teachers, shop assistants, etc.

For some, it may mean vocational English so that they can work or study in their previously-chosen field.

It was generally felt that the 510 hours of free English language classes were insufficient; and that it was unreasonable to expect adults to learn another language in such a short period of time; and to a level that will assist them gain employment. Some participants suggested the time should be doubled while others suggested that the teachers should be bi-lingual allowing for communication exchange where students just do not understand what the teacher is trying to teach them in English.

It has been found, particularly with African entrants, that they come from an aural tradition so may not be literate (or are pre-literate) in their first language even though they can speak 2-3 other languages fluently. Some English language programs have found it beneficial to teach literacy skills in their first language before trying to teach them English literacy skills.

The use of bi-lingual African teachers will increase job opportunities for some and act as positive role models for their students.

The lack of resources, such as bi-lingual and pictorial dictionaries, at English Language Centres did not encourage self-learning.

There needs to be a realisation that some people will never acquire enough English language skills to be able to participate fully in Australian society so mechanisms need to be put in place to assist them throughout their life. This would include having qualified interpreters, and information provided in their own language. The person would need to be literate in their own language.

Restrictions to participating in English classes

Lack of affordable childcare restricted the participation of many African women in English classes and, consequently, would affect their ability to find employment in the future. If unable to acquire sufficient English language skills, African women could become socially isolated in the home and eventually become unemployable.

The pressure to find work can take precedence over learning English. If a new arrival is lucky enough to find work in the first six months, they often have to drop out of English classes, as there are rarely any after-hours language programs.

Life Skills Classes

English language classes should be extended to include practical information sessions that cover various aspects of living in Australia. They could include –

- Completing forms
- Centrelink benefits
- Newstart Allowance and 'mutual obligation'
- money and budgeting
- shopping and credit
- consumer awareness especially when entering into contracts for mobile phones or buying cars
- banking and loans
- using new technology such as telephones, computers and the internet
- public housing
- private renting
- rights and responsibilities of tenants
- household management
- how to find work
- rights and responsibilities of employees and employers
- explore small business opportunities
- the Medicare system
- how the different health professionals work together to provide effective treatment
- learning to drive and the responsibilities of being a driver and a car owner
- parenting and disciplining children
- Family law

This list is by no means exhaustive and sessions may need to be open-ended to allow for participants to ask questions about other things they may not understand.

Depending on when these sessions are delivered during the settlement process, they may need to be delivered in a bi-lingual format so all participants receive and understand the information.

These sessions should promote independence by teaching participants how to do certain things for themselves. They should help newly-arrived migrants and refugees avoid some of the common consumer pitfalls that they just do not have the financial resources to work back from.

Mainstreaming primary and secondary students

It is our understanding that refugees and humanitarian entrants under the age of 18 attend special English Language centres until they acquire enough English skills to be able to attend a mainstream school.

It was noted that there were not as many English Language schools, or they were not as well located as the AMES offices causing some students, who have to rely on public transport, to travel long distances to attend. One example was a student living in Altona North traveling to Brunswick to attend English language school.

When they had finished at English Language School, students were given a list of schools that offered English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Often these schools were not in the areas where the refugees were settled. Such education requirements should be taken into account when deciding where to settle these families.

Because the AMES offices seem to be better located, it was suggested that perhaps AMES could be resourced to provide English language classes for students under 18.

Homework Assistance

It was acknowledged that it was difficult for parents, who had not acquired sufficient English literacy and numeracy skills, to help their children with homework. Many schools did offer After-School Homework programs but this needed to be encouraged in all schools where there was a need. Volunteer organizations, such as the St Vincent de Paul Society, have implemented Homework/Tutoring programs in areas where they have identified a high need, such as Dandenong and Sunshine. However, the government education system should also encourage them in high migrant settlement areas.

African Australians with sufficient English language skills should be employed in schools with high need areas should be resourced with teachers aides to support the students in their studies; and community liaison workers to help parents of newly-arrived students understand the Australian education system. It was noted that

schools in some areas experienced significant increases in the number of students from an African background. Programs and funding needed to be more responsive to these sudden increases.

Disengaged Youth

It was raised at many of the consultations that the African education system was based on educational achievement rather than age. Many parents were concerned that their children were being placed in classes beyond their educational capabilities. It was conceded that it would be disruptive to current class structures and demeaning to the students if there were adolescents in primary school classes. Better targeted programs were needed to help adolescents to fit in to the Australian education system.

Some Australian adolescent males naturally become disengaged with education during their middle secondary years. However, it is more common in African Australian males who may not have acquired sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to continue at school but possibly were never engaged in the education system in the first place.

There may need to be an acceptance that some African adolescents will not attain acceptable levels of education before they drop out of school. As such there needs to be a more engaging program (e.g. VCAL pathways) to attract them to vocational training of some sort that will eventually lead to meaningful employment. Otherwise, they will end up as long-term welfare recipients.

Catholic education system

As Catholic organisations, we are concerned that Catholic families are not being referred to the local Catholic parish for pastoral assistance and contact with the local Catholic school. Under the enrolment policy of the Catholic education system, every Catholic child is entitled to a Catholic education and by the caseworker automatically referring them to the local government/state school, they are denying them a choice of a Catholic education.

Recognition of overseas qualifications

Some participants were disappointed that, when they presented at the employment service, the caseworker did not explore the possibility of upgrading or recognizing their overseas qualifications. One participant was a teacher in Africa for 7 years. When he inquired about upgrading his teaching degree, he was told he would have to study for 4 years. It seemed that new arrivals received few credits for previous studies or work experience.

By failing to encourage African teachers into the Australian education system, we are failing to provide African role models to African students, especially for adolescent males who are leaving school as soon as they are old enough.

Often the fees to upgrade, or recognise prior qualifications are prohibitive. The HECS debt system is not widely understood and discourages many from further study. Many do not understand the concept of not having to pay the debt back until they are earning a certain income.

Learning to Drive

Public driving school programs should be developed to help newly-arrived migrants and refugees to upgrade their current drivers' licences or to obtain a new Australian state licence. It was important not only to teach people how to drive and to follow the road rules but to inform them of their legal obligations to be licenced and to drive a well-maintained, registered, insured car.

Employment & Training

Most Africans are keen and anxious to be gainfully employed and earning sufficient wages to support not only their immediate families in Australia but also their extended families, particularly those who remain in the country of origin or in countries of 'temporary' settlement.

Discrimination in the workforce

Most Africans, speaking a language other than English as a first language, have experienced great difficulty in obtaining any employment. Against the backdrop of the growing global financial crisis, new arrivals have found it increasingly difficult to find employment. Those who do, often find the employment takes no account of the skills or qualifications they have obtained elsewhere. Instances of tertiary qualified persons working in factories or abattoirs were not uncommon.

Recognition of prior learning, where applicable, is costly and no guarantee of success for new arrivals. Often new arrivals are encouraged to train to get certain licences or certificates to improve their employment prospects. Some courses, such as security or bar staff training, cost the individual but do not necessarily lead to employment. There was some concern among people who work with the African communities that they are being talked in to doing courses in which that they will probably never find work (e.g. financial planning; or an optometry student who would not have the social network be able to set up in private practice).

Instances were brought forth whereby even those with recognised trade qualifications and sponsorship to migrate to Australia were left without employment before the end of the contracted period.

African Australians tend to be employed in casual and part-time positions for unreasonably long periods of time. In one case, the person had been a casual employee for two years. Some participants had seen people who started at the same time as them, gain permanent positions while they still remained as casual employees. Also, because of the casual nature of their employment, African Australians could easily be dismissed during an economic downturn. One participant who was injured at work was dismissed when he returned to work on light duties.

One participant suggested that there perhaps should be an Employer Incentive Scheme (like the one for Indigenous Australians) to encourage employers to give African workers the opportunity to work, to gain work experience and to acquire work references.

Job Search Services

There was considerable criticism of the employment agencies being paid to find refugees work. As previously stated, many felt the services did not take in to account the previous qualifications and work experience applicants may have. They did not

explore the possibilities for upgrading qualifications or finding work in areas where the client could gain work experience in their chosen field. Participants at some of the consultations were teachers and nurses with several years experience. However, when they inquired about having their overseas qualification recognised, they received neither credit for previous studies nor recognition for past work experience. In effect, they were often asked to do the whole degree again.

Some participants said the employment service would only contact them when they had found a job in a factory. The employment services did not seem to feel obligated to find work for clients anywhere else except in factories. Some refugees did not understand that their Newstart Allowance may be cut off if they continually refused job offers at factories.

Initial interviews at employment services were relatively negative experiences. Instead of helping clients navigate through job advertisements that they may be able to go for, they were told to go look at jobs they would like to do. Then they would be told they would not even be considered for those positions because of various reasons.

It was generally felt the employment services were just recruitment agencies for factories. If a client received a job in a factory, they were given a safety vest from the employment agency and sent to the factory where they received induction and information about Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) in English. There was concern that some African employees may not understand the information being imparted, thus exposing them to risk. They may not be aware of their rights as workers and the responsibilities of employers towards them. This information could be part of the on-going, life-skilling /information sessions suggested earlier. It was also suggested an African union could be formed, or existing unions could employ African shop-stewards, to advise African workers.

Technology as a barrier to access

Access to computers and the internet is a further barrier to African Australians trying to find work. Many jobs, even jobs in supermarkets and fast food chains, require applicants to apply online or send their application and resume by email.

One participant complained that some graduate positions have a 15-minute time limit to complete a psychometric test as part of the application. For applicants, whose first language is not English, this is an arbitrary way of culling thousands of applicants for just 25 positions. This was the case for students who had done their tertiary studies here in Australia. Imagine how hard it must be for unskilled workers to look for jobs on the internet.

Housing

Competing for Private Rentals

Finding accommodation is difficult for the average low income earning Australian, even so it is more difficult for African Australians with limited English, low income and no rental history. Often they are openly discriminated against being told a property has been leased only to find it still being advertised weeks later.

Even if they are lucky enough to get into the private rental market, they are often squeezed out again by unreasonably high rent increases.

As many African Australian families will rely on Centrelink payments for some time, homeownership seems an impossible dream. Thus, either the private rental market or the public housing sector needs to cater for their needs.

Lack of Public Housing

It is realised that the problems African Australians face finding accommodation are within an already tight housing market. However, the Federal Government has invited or selected them to come here so provision should be made for their long-term housing needs. If they cannot compete in the private rental market, then governments should give them priority to public housing.

There needs to be some form of affirmative action to place new arrivals in a position of equality of opportunity in the rental market. Perhaps if they had initial settlement in transitional accommodation long enough for them to develop a rental history, rental references and find work, they could exit the public housing system permanently. Again, it is incumbent upon governments to make a real commitment to public housing for all Australians who need it, including newly arrived African Australians.

Information about how to go about finding accommodation needs to be available to African Australians in their first language.

Culturally-inappropriate housing

There is a belief that no matter how bad the standard of housing in Australia, it is better than what most refugees experience in their country of origin. Even if this was the case, it is no justification for housing African Australians in substandard housing. Because Africans come from a primarily agricultural background, they have found it extremely difficult to live in high-rise buildings where there is no ability to 'till the soil' or to connect with the earth. Melbourne's high-rise flats have been found to be inappropriate for Australian-born urbanised people so they are not going to be any more appropriate for newly-arrived Africans, with their long agricultural tradition.

Australia's average 3-bedroom house is not large enough for most African families; and when they sponsor relatives to come to Australia and have an obligation to house them during the first 2 years of settlement, they will do this, further adding to an already overcrowded situation.

Unscrupulous mortgage brokers

During the consultation period, it came to our attention that there were some unscrupulous (and / or uncaring) home loan lenders in the western suburbs of Melbourne specifically targeting African Australians with 110% loans that they know are beyond the financial means for repayment.

The developer gets his money from the banks and the banks get the mortgagee to take out exorbitant insurance to insure the loan for the bank and, once the mortgagee defaults, the bank sells the house and gets their money back. The developer has got the First Home Buyers grant; and the mortgagee is left without a home, with a very bad credit record and now no prospect of ever owning their own home.

It was suggested that the possibility of a housing co-operative program for African Australians be explored.

Centralised Support

It is only logical that people with little or no English are going to want to live in neighbourhoods or communities where they are understood. However, with Australia's fear of the development of 'ghettos', we are denying new arrivals one of the most basic support systems they need for successful settlement. It is better to allow people to settle in certain areas and concentrate services in these areas rather than spread humanitarian entrants across metropolitan and regional areas. The social and cultural support they can provide to each other, will alleviate the need for other services.

Health

The participants at the consultations expressed general satisfaction with the Australian health system. Any problems they did experience were often caused by misunderstandings or were problems most Australians experienced when accessing the health system.

Generally, Africans did not attend the doctor unless they were very ill. When they attended back in Africa, their health was monitored by having a blood test and they would often be prescribed medication. Because of the seriousness of many African diseases, a blood test provided some 'peace of mind'. In Australia, they were concerned that they were not being treated correctly if they did not have a blood test or came away from the doctor's without a prescription.

It was noted that African Australians presented with diseases that were not commonly seen in Australia (e.g. lack of sunlight caused vitamin D and iodine deficiencies). The health authorities needed to keep doctors informed of emerging health issues in the African Australian population. There should be regular reminders to use interpreters, where necessary, so patients are fully aware of their health situation and the treatments available to them.

The existence of specialist Refugee Health services and nurses went some way to providing African Australians with the health care they needed. Where they did not have access to such services, they needed to be encouraged to start building rapport with one doctor or clinic, especially if they had children or a chronic illness.

Torture & Trauma Counseling

Because every African Australian has experienced some type of trauma, it is recommended that every refugee and humanitarian entrant should undergo an initial torture and trauma session to make them aware of the possible effects of post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS). As other pressures (such as housing and employment) subside, PTSS could manifest itself years after the settlement period. People needed to be aware of the symptoms so they could self-refer, if necessary.

Peer support groups should be encouraged to provide preventative assistance before the problem escalates and becomes a problem with domestic violence or drug abuse.

Preventative Health Care

African Australians needed to be encouraged to take preventative measures, such as have regular medical and dental checks, rather than wait till they are extremely ill.

It is understood that refugees and humanitarian entrants undergo an initial health check and referral, if they have on-going health issues. They should also be encouraged to have a follow-up check perhaps 5 years later to see if change in diet

and nutrition has adversely affected their health. Increased sugar intake has contributed to dental decay, obesity and the increased incidence of diabetes. It may be an opportunity for some entrepreneurial Africans to grow and distribute traditional African foods.

Important health information should be available to them in their first language.

Ambulance Cover

Without access to private transport and tending to only seek medical assistance when very ill, African Australians may tend to call an ambulance to take them to the hospital. Without ambulance cover, they could be liable for thousands of dollars in transport costs. The importance of having ambulance cover, especially with children, needed to be explained to African Australians along with other important aspects of the Australian health care system.

Justice

The Australian system of justice has its roots in the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy and the British common law system. The overwhelming majority of Africans settled in Australia have arrived as refugees, not migrants. This is an important distinction when considering the interaction and interface between the African communities and the Australian justice system. Many have fled dictatorial regimes in their country of origin and have arrived in Australia not by free choice but through necessity.

Most Africans, settled in Australia, come from nations that were colonised by countries other than the United Kingdom so the understanding of the Westminster system of justice is extremely limited. Even for those from former British colonies, there will have been very little experience of what we might call 'British justice' because of the existence of dictatorial parliamentary systems which pay little more than lip service to the rule of law.

Civil Justice

Access to, and participation in, the civil judicial system for most new arrivals is limited due to the following reasons:

- Language barriers: The use of interpreters, though helpful, mitigates little the barrier to accessing a legal system, which is conducted entirely in English.
- Finances: As new arrivals, most Africans have very limited financial resources, most relying exclusively or heavily on Centrelink payments. As Legal Aid is provided only in relation to criminal matters, most Africans are unable to access the justice system to enforce civil rights.
- Historical barriers: Most Africans arrive from nations colonised by European countries using the Inquisitorial or Napoleonic systems of justice. Overwhelmingly, the operation of the Australian civil justice system is unknown to most.
- Education: Most Africans have had little education (formal or informal) regarding the Australian civil justice system and, therefore, have little understanding of it.

Criminal Justice

For most Africans, the major interaction with the Australian justice system will be in the area of criminal law. It will generally derive from an encounter, good or bad, with the Victorian Police Force. Most African arrivals in Australia will, at best, be wary of uniformed figures of authority and, at worst, hostile to such persons.

Once again, the understanding of the criminal justice system in Australia by African new arrivals will be extremely limited. For many Africans, the experience of the criminal system of justice in their country of origin is an amalgam of laws imposed by

dictatorial regimes, traditional tribal law and custom. Australia's claim to be a multicultural society can be confusing for many Africans when their understanding of acceptable behaviour is challenged by Australian criminal law. A case in point is the understanding relating to discipline within the family structure. In the tradition of most African nations, the male head of the family is responsible for the discipline within the family unit. This may include the use of corporal punishment that, on occasion, may transgress laws relating to assault and battery. Many African men indicated that they saw the involvement of police as an intrusion into their personal marital relationship and a challenge to their traditional authority within the domestic situation.

Many African new arrivals may have experienced long periods of war, civil unrest and/or periods of residing in refugee camps. Their experience and understanding of the 'rule of law' is consequently limited. With the example of many people spending periods of 10, 15, even up to 20 years in refugee camps, a new generation of youth has been born with very little understanding of criminal law in a Western society. For Australian society, these African new arrivals are the first experience of 'immigrants' with no understanding of, or respect for the rule of law.

In the interaction between African youth, who include amongst their number those who have been child soldiers, and the Victorian Police, whose officers have had little training to understand the experience of African youth, it is a sad inevitability that conflict will arise through mutual misunderstanding and suspicion.

It was noted that the Victorian Police and Metropolitan Fire Brigade do employ Multicultural Liaison Officers and have sent officers to Africa to gain some insight into what life was like before being settled in Australia. The Victorian Police are currently trying to recruit their first African police officer from the western suburbs of Melbourne; and there is an African Australian soldier currently deployed in the Solomon Islands.

Many instances were gathered of Africans, who have pleaded guilty in criminal matters resulting from frustration and misunderstanding rather than any genuine admission of guilt.

As mentioned above, many Africans are unable to access the Legal Aid system. This can occur even in criminal justice matters and so many find themselves totally reliant upon volunteer legal service providers.

The recruitment of 10 bilingual refugee educators by the Victorian government was seen as a very positive step in support of refugee access to and understanding of the justice system.

Emerging Issues/Other Areas of Concern

These were other issues of concern raised during the community consultations –

Teenage Pregnancies

Pregnancies among African teenage girls are on the increase. However, the traditional or tribal way of dealing with this problem is leading to young girls being ostracized and thrown out of the family home. Sex education and pregnancy support programs perhaps need to be developed to specifically target African girls.

It was noted that they are generally falling pregnant to disaffected African youth.

Our concern is the intergenerational reliance on welfare this may cause.

Intergenerational Conflict

Like each wave of new migrants before them, African Australians are also experiencing intergenerational conflict or 'the generation gap'. Due to financial independence (through receiving Centrelink payments directly), some young people are rebelling against their parents' authority and are even being encouraged to move out of home so as to receive more Centrelink benefits. The communication gap between the generations will become increasingly difficult to resolve. As parents' English language skills do not develop to the level of their children and adolescents do not have a mature enough command of their first language, it will be harder to find 'a common language' in which to discuss deeper life issues, such as personal values, morals and sexuality. The lack of extended family structures also hinders the passing on of important life lessons. For example, grandparents traditionally passed on the family's values around morality and sexuality. Without grandparents being present in Australia, this important information is not being transmitted to the next generation.

Marriage Separation

Migrating to another country can put incredible stress on marriages and families. The difficulties each family member may be experiencing can have a compounding affect on the relationship of parents. They may not be united in their approach to life in the new country. The changing roles of men and women in the family can bring them in to conflict with each other over matters, such as money or how to bring up the children. It was acknowledged that there was an excellent DVD on parenting in Australia presented in various African languages and perhaps schools, kindergartens and health centres could encourage it to be viewed by as many African Australian parents as possible.

Obligation to Family Left Behind

The strong sense of responsibility to extended family left behind should not be underestimated. When mothers have left children behind or young families have left grandparents, there is a strong urge to support them by sending money overseas. For African Australians, the responsibility to family comes first so will send money overseas to family before paying the rent. This gets them into financial difficulties and they need to understand that the money they receive in Australia is for their

survival in this country and to find other ways to support family overseas. Through volunteer networks, small groups could fundraise for family members still overseas.

Social & Religious Connection

It is only logical that people with little or no English are going to want to live in neighbourhoods where they are understood. However, Australia's fear of the development of ghettos means we are denying new arrivals an important support system during the settlement period. (There is no evidence that in the past where migrant settled that ghettos developed.) Isolating small numbers of new arrivals across metropolitan and regional areas is not conducive to their successful settlement.

In order to assist newly arrived African communities to participate and adjust to Australian society, the Australian government should take account of the spiritual and moral needs of newly arrived refugees. Africans are generally a very spiritual people, yet no account is made of this when assisting arrivals during their 6 month initial settlement. Connecting new arrivals to the faith community of their choosing would in the opinion of most assist in the speedy and harmonious adjustment to Australian society.

Itinerant Workers

Some African Australians have found long-term employment in abattoirs in regional areas, such as Castlemaine, Victoria. Our concern is that this is resulting in family separation as the men are itinerant workers during the week and return home to their families in Melbourne on the weekends. Consequently, married women are being forced to raise their families by themselves while their husbands are away working during the week.

Support for Community Leaders

There are a number of registered associations and unofficial groups amongst African communities in Victoria. Often the community leaders of these organisations have little more knowledge of Australian society than the many members of these communities who call upon their leaders for help. By providing additional training, education and resources for community leaders, the communities that they represent will be better placed in adjusting to Australian society. Interpreters were in a similar situation as they were often called upon to provide other information or explain complex social welfare services rather than just translating words. It was suggested that perhaps they needed some social welfare training

Media Reporting

There was concern expressed that media reporting of 'black gangs' roaming the streets and taking over railway stations and shopping centres worked against African Australians looking for work or trying find housing for their families. It was noted that media outlets were now not supposed to refer to the ethnic background of alleged criminals but this has perhaps come too late to change some Australians attitudes to African residents.

Conclusion

We see from the project parameters framework (on p.6 of the discussion paper) –

- The lack of education can impact on finding a place to live, looking for employment or accessing the justice or health systems;
- Inadequate housing can affect both physical and mental health; or
- Poor health can impact on learning or working.

Thus, any improvements in one area will have positive impacts in other areas.

Having stable employment means you can commit to longer rental leases.

Having more long-term shelter means your children's education will not be so fragmented.

And, by being able to bring up happy, well-adjusted children will mean healthy and productive adults in the future.

The main aim is, no matter where improvements are made in the settlement process, any improvements will contribute to the greater wellbeing of newly arrived refugees and migrants and their children into the future.

Discussion Starters

What were some of your experiences when first settling here?
(e.g. during first 6 months)
Who picked you up from the airport and took you to your first home?
How much did they, or could they, explain to you?
How long before your case worker came to see you?
What were your experiences of your case worker?
Were they helpful? Could they speak your language?
Did they help you find a school for your children?
Did they help you find work?
What other help did they provide?
Was there anything you wished they helped you better with?

What barriers do you face

- accessing education and training courses?
- finding a job?
- finding 'meaningful employment'? What does this mean to you?
(For example, did you have a qualification or experience in a particular profession but cannot get into that profession in Australia)
- finding a place to live?
- going to the doctors?
- accessing the health care system?

What are some of the effects (health, social, cultural) of not finding appropriate work or housing?

What experiences have you had

- finding a job or a course to study?
- finding a place to live?
- finding your way around in a new place?

What kinds of jobs are open to you?

What kinds of training helped you find work?

Were you shown how to put a resume together?

Did you find employment agencies, such as JobNetwork, helpful?

Did you feel 'understood' or were they directing you to jobs you weren't really interested in?

Can you suggest ways things could have been made easier?

Do you think you have ever been discriminated against because of

- race?
- religion?
- gender?
- age?

Language is a barrier to access.

When have you felt misunderstood and what were the problems this caused?

How could this have been avoided?