SHARED EXPERIENCE AND LEARNING FROM AFRICAN COMMUNITIES IN AUSTRALIA
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Welcome to the 2017 winter edition of our Australian Mosaic magazine. This edition’s theme, Shared Experience and Learning from African Communities in Australia, addresses the diversity represented by the many African communities in Australia, their challenges and their contributions to our society and to shared goals.

The contributors explore challenges that many of Australia’s African communities are facing every day. A number of authors write about the barriers faced by new and emerging African communities with regards to employment, education and settlement in Australia, in particular their unfamiliarity with services and institutions. There is also concern among these new communities about proposed changes to citizenship legislations and the accompanying rhetoric which, at times, has been divisive. We wanted to highlight the communities’ own experiences living in Australia under the shadow of these changes and anti-immigration sentiment. More importantly though, this edition celebrates the contributions people from African communities are making to Australia as well as the many small community projects across the country engaged in building resilience and empowerment.

African communities in Australia are diverse, vibrant and resourceful. Covering countries from South Africa in the south and Kenya in east to Egypt, Algeria and Libya in the north, a vast number of African languages, cultures and histories are represented in Australia. The 2011 census data showed there were close to 340,000 people of African descent living in Australia. This number increased to around 390,000 in the 2016 Census numbers with a significant increase in arrivals from refugee countries such Ethiopia, Eritrea, DR Congo and Somalia.

Members of African communities come to Australia as skilled migrants, partners or students while many others arrive through Australia’s humanitarian program. The main focus of this edition of Australian Mosaic are those who have arrived here as refugees. This is due to the overwhelming response to our call for papers from people involved in projects working with newly arrived African communities who have come to Australia as humanitarian entrants.

The population in Australia of Africans from a refugee background reached a peak in the mid-2000s with a large number of South Sudanese arriving in Australia. As with many other migrant and refugee communities before them, the South Sudanese experienced some of the more challenging aspects of being a new community in Australia. In particular,
media made detrimental reports on the perceived South Sudanese’ inability to integrate and on alleged challenges around youth crime. History has shown that most migrant communities experienced some kind of discrimination when they first arrived in Australia—from the Irish of the 1850-1890s, to the first post-war migration wave of mostly Europeans and refugees from Vietnam and Lebanon in the 1970-1980s. However, recent research by the Scanlon Foundation has demonstrated an increased level of discrimination in Australia based on appearance. For the South Sudanese and other recent arrivals from African backgrounds, their visibility is probably the most significant difference from previous migrant groups. A 2015 Scanlon Foundation Report demonstrated that over the preceding 12 month period experience of discrimination was at ‘the highest level among some African groups’, with discrimination indicated by 53% of those from Egypt, 60% of those from Ethiopia, 67% of those from Kenya, 75% of those from Zimbabwe, and 77% of those from South Sudan.1

People arriving as refugees face many barriers in the initial settlement period, often due to lack of English skills, sometimes low literacy skills, a lack of appropriate employment skills and disrupted schooling because of conflict and flight, and time spent in refugee camps. At the same time, people who have arrived here as refugees have faced situations where they have demonstrated incredible strength and resilience.

The articles submitted in this edition of the Australian Mosaic discuss some of these issues and highlight a number of themes. These themes include the significant contribution made by African communities to the Australian society. In particular, the articles highlight that when given opportunities, members of the African communities embrace these, go on to thrive and achieve, and develop a strong sense of belonging to this country; the importance of leadership and role models within African communities themselves; the work African community leaders are undertaking with their own communities by focusing on programs to develop leadership, engage youth, improve education and employment skills; and are working together to turn around the negative image too frequently portrayed by Australia’s media.

The message that this edition of Australian Mosaic promotes through this compilation of perspectives and experience is that Australian society needs to shift away from stigmatising and stereotyping people from different backgrounds. The media must shift from looking at members of the African communities through a negative lens and as a burden to society, but rather to celebrate the potential in sharing cultures and recognising the enormity of skills, culture and knowledge brought by African communities in Australia. We must look at the best ways to enable African communities to fulfil their potential and to build confidence in their talents and abilities. Our expectations from people from refugee or migrant backgrounds need to rise to provide the space and opportunity to allow them to be equal contributors to our society. Equally, in the context of the proposed changes to the Citizenship Act, it is important to remember that people thrive when they feel welcomed and embraced and with equality of opportunities. It is FECCA’s strong belief that through allocation of resources to improve access to employment, to education and training, and to capacity building as well as support and encouragement throughout the initial settlement period, African communities will thrive in Australia.

It is my hope that this issue of Australian Mosaic will contribute towards a greater understanding of the many African communities in this country, their contributions and their achievements, and also provide an informed focal point for discussion.

I sincerely thank all the contributors to this issue—for sharing their experiences, thoughts and knowledge and their commitment to a cohesive and inclusive Australia.

1 Markus, Professor Andrew, Australians Today, the Australia @2015 Scanlon Foundation Survey.
It is with great pleasure that I write this introduction to our *Australian Mosaic*, issue 46. The topic of this issue has been long-coming—*Shared Experiences and Learning from African Communities in Australia*. This edition celebrates the contributions made to Australia by African communities. It looks at the various community based programs around the country that are developed by and for African communities to empower, build resilience and support African migrants in Australia.

We experienced an overwhelming response to our call for contributors. Reflecting on both challenges and achievements, the contributors look into issues such as education, employment, language and discrimination. We also have articles on empowerment and role models within the African community and how these experiences can create leadership for African migrants and broader Australian society.

As demonstrated in all of the articles in this issue, the African communities in Australia—whether new or more established—will thrive if given the opportunity to do so. These articles demonstrate what is needed for a successful Australian multicultural society: good leadership across all communities, equality of opportunity and access and equity in service provision including language, education and employment services. The strength and resilience demonstrated in the articles in this issue provide an example of how new communities are working to establish themselves and enhance Australian society through participation and contribution.

Dr David Lucas starts this issue with a brief overview of the African population in Australia. His article gives an indication of the population of Africans in Australia as per the 2016 Census. Dr Lucas notes the diversity among African migrants and the different challenges they meet in Australia, depending upon their migration journey.

Some contributors address different challenges faced by specific communities. Dr Berhan Ahmed looks at how an investment in education will ensure a positive future, not only for individuals but for the Australian society as a whole. He looks at African youth and how they are often discouraged to use their full potential due to disrupted education in early life. Dr Ahmed links disrupted education with the challenges faced by some with socialisation and integration. By missing out on education, young children miss out on the opportunity to learn cultural norms, rules and expectations of educational institutions or the workplace.

In response to the recent proposals around citizenship qualification, Sidique Bah reflects on his own experiences of arriving in Australia from Sierra Leone. Mr Bah in particular notes the positive experience of becoming a citizen of Australia and how this may become a distant dream for many, and the impact this will have on many communities in Australia. He reflects briefly on the rule of law and how Australia must ensure equality before the law as a principle of Australian democracy.
Nyadol Nyuon, a young woman of African heritage, tells her own story starting in South Sudan, then a refugee camp and now as a successful lawyer in Melbourne. Ms Nyuon points towards the success stories of people in Australia that have arrived from South Sudan. She also reflects on the negative media attention many young South Sudanese refugees experience and how this can draw the attention away from the many positive stories we can find in African Australian communities.

Dr Janecke Wille looks at South Sudanese men and women and their experiences with developing a sense of belonging. English skills and social relations with wider Australian society were seen as crucial for many of the participants in her research. Dr Wille brings in emotional quotes from the participants on experiences with settling and feeling at home. Her research demonstrates how English skills, education, employment and community relations can encourage participation and increase self-esteem of migrants through feeling part of their new society.

Agok Martin Majier reflects on her own experiences of arriving in Australia. She tells an intimate and moving story about fleeing from South Sudan via a refugee camp and finally arriving in Australia as a young girl. She reflects on starting school as the only African pupil and on getting her first job in this country. Ms Martin Majier concludes her article by looking at her own positive settlement experience based on a knowledge of English, her education and her stable support network. She acknowledges that many other African refugees and migrants coming to Australia are not always equally fortunate.

The story of African youth in Australia, too often (and unfairly) portrayed as ‘problems’ and outsiders in the media, is addressed through a number of articles. Ms Tinyiko Seane looks into the challenges young African meet in their daily lives and how a better understanding of the community can lead to opportunities to improve the effectiveness of strategies already in place. Ms Seane also points to the need for strong leadership.

Atem Atem looks at positive initiatives developed as a response to the need for role models and writes about the power of sport. Mr Atem describes how a basketball team in Sydney, NSW is empowering young African men through community building, respect and mentoring.

Liss Gabb from the cohealth Arts Generator reflects on the positive contribution that African youth are making when given the opportunity. She writes on behalf of a group of young men from South Sudan, Uganda and Burundi and their development of the To Be a Brother project—a project aiming at providing mentors and support in addressing the increased level of alcohol use among young men from African backgrounds. Focusing on dialogue and lived experiences, the project is combating the exclusion felt by some African youth in Australia, in particular men, by increasing self-esteem, with the added goal of reducing alcohol consumption.

Some African women in Australia are more isolated. Gender, family responsibilities and for some, limited education opportunities, create additional barriers. In this issue we look at some of the issues faced by many African women in the country. Many of the articles focus on the importance of empowerment.

Dr Mimmie Claudine Watts addresses this issue by examining the lived experiences of two women from an African background in Australia. Dr Watts argues for more research on African women in
Australia—their aspirations and contributions—and understanding of what energises and inspires African women in Australia to take chances and participate in the broader society.

Alison Baker reflects on the success that a group of young South Sudanese women experienced in their use of community arts as a force for social change. New Change is a group of women using dance and poetry to speak about the strength and resilience of South Sudanese youth. They use art to create change in their lives and in the way they are perceived by media and the surrounding community.

Wadzanai Nenzou, a social entrepreneur, reflects on the positive impact economic empowerment of women can have on communities and broader society. Women meet many barriers in their economic empowerment. These must be addressed to help women in shaping their own lives and thrive in Australian society.

As a reflection on the importance of media in reaching out to the many African communities in Australia, SBS Radio gives a brief look into the many languages and cultures represented on the radio and the benefits this gives to the communities in Australia.

Kofi Osei Bonsu gives details on two initiatives celebrating the African community in Canberra—Celebrate African Australian in the ACT and Africa Day. Both events bring together Africans living in Canberra, politicians and community leaders in celebrating African culture and achievements in Australia.

Parsuram Sharma-Luital JP talks about the importance of creating links between the many new African communities and the police. With a focus on Victoria, Mr Sharma-Luital reflects on the positive experiences of sharing food in a friendly and encouraging environment. By talking and listening both the police and the refugee communities are learning valuable stories that can make working together a more positive experiences.

Jennifer Hippsley from Future Voices addresses the needs in the diverse community of Shepparton in rural Victoria. Future Voices coach members of migrant and refugee communities in the planning and delivering of projects. The goal is to provide employment opportunities and improve young refugee and migrants’ employability skills. She argues that outcomes are much more positive when communities are involved in shaping their own settlement process.

Stephen Sibanda and Dr Charles Mphande look at the African Australian Communities Leadership Forum (AACLF) established as a response to challenges faced by many African communities in Australia and the often negative media coverage that the communities are receiving. The project does this by encouraging African communities to work together collaboratively and strategically to achieve common goals.

This edition is a reflection on, and celebration of, African migrants to Australia. Having lived and worked in Swaziland and Sierra Leone it brings me great joy to be able to see so many African migrants in Australia sharing their culture while establishing themselves and their families in their Australian home. I wish to thank all the contributors to this issue for sharing their experiences, their personal journeys, their projects and work in Australia, to promote the African community and the contribution African migrants make to the broader Australian community.
Africans have become a significant part of the Australian population. In 1961 the number of Africa-born individuals in Australia (excluding those born in Egypt) was 12,272, of whom 7,896 were born in South Africa and 4,376 in ‘Other countries in Africa’. As the numbers increased more detail was given in the Australian Census about Country of Birth. Recently released 2016 Census results show increases in the numbers for almost all African countries.

Between the 2001 and 2011 Australian Censuses showed the number of persons born in all Sub-Saharan African (SSA) nations doubled to 295,375. This excludes persons born in the North African countries of Egypt (36,533 in 2011), Libya (2,558), Morocco (1,564), Algeria (1,169), Tunisia (480) and Western Sahara (5). If the total for these six countries is added to those ‘not further defined’ this gives 42,451, so 337,826 Africa-born were enumerated in the 2011 Census. By 2016, the total for all Africa-born had risen to 388,683.

This number also excludes people born outside of Africa who have been raised in countries such as Zimbabwe and have migrated to Australia when conditions in Africa changed.

The South Africa-born have always dominated and in 2011 the South Africa-born alone numbered over 145,000, rising to over 162,000 in 2016. In the same period the total for all other Southern African countries increased from around 40,000 to over 45,000. An important distinction can be made between countries which send skilled migrants (South Africa and Zimbabwe) and ‘refugee source countries’ which largely supply humanitarian entrants (mainly Sudan, including South Sudan, Horn of Africa defined as Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia, and Central Africa including Burundi, Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo). The skilled migrants are mostly from Southern Africa. Both males and females have benefitted from the superior education available to Europeans in the past, speak English as a first language and have relevant work experience. Gail Kelly, CEO of Westpac until 2015 is

Prior to joining the Australian National University as a Demographer in 1976, Dr David Lucas worked as an Economists/Statistican for the Governments of Basutoland (now Lesotho) and Kenya and as Demographic Adviser to the University of Lagos.
an example. South Africans come from an economy like that of Australia’s with a reliance on mining and with sophisticated financial systems.

At the other extreme, many refugees on arrival often have had their schooling interrupted, do not speak English well, and have limited experience of completing forms and of the banking system. Furthermore, their work experience, such as cattle herding and growing vegetables on a small scale, may not be immediately relevant to the Australian economy. The eight refugee source countries mentioned above exhibit substantial increases in recent years, totaling around 46,000 in 2011 and 56,000 in 2016.

In recent decades, after the post-war demand for unskilled labour in Australia had subsided, English proficiency became recognised as a pathway to employment and as a predictor of unemployment. Research shows the percentages of Africans from refugee-source countries who do not speak English well or at all: the Francophones do worst with 37% of those from Burundi in this category, and 22% from the Democratic Republic of Congo, although this is matched by 23% for the Eritrea-born. Further, research has demonstrated that within the Sudan-born in 2011, 9% of males and 24% of females did not speak English well or at all. For adult males this percent rose from 3% in age group 15-19 to 23% in age group 50-54. For adult females aged 15-19 the percent was similar at only 4% but the peak of 47% at ages 65 and over was considerably higher.

The end of Australia’s mining boom may have impacted on the demand for skilled labour and the new restrictions on 457 Visa entrants may compound this. The ethnic composition may be changing as presaged by the rising number of Shona speakers from Zimbabwe. In contrast the number of Afrikaans speakers from South Africa has been rising faster than the numbers of Zulu speakers.

Prominent amongst Black Africans this year were Evans Lagundah and Lucy Gichuhi. Lagundah, Chief Scientific Officer, CSIRO, was inducted into the Australian Academy of Sciences. He is a graduate of the University of Ghana and keeps in touch with the West Africa Centre for Crop Improvement. Kenya-born Senator Gichuhi is the first Black African to be elected to the Australian Parliament. Migrants from West and East Africa deserve more attention, as do Francophone Africans.

A useful expansion of analysis might be to look at birth cohorts, for example characteristics of Somali-born aged 15-19 in 2011 can be compared with those aged 20-24 five years later. Improved educational qualifications and employment rates in the five year-period would be a good sign.

The situation in parts of Africa is currently very bleak with drought and conflict contributing to famine. Australia’s response has been to cut aid to Africa by 82%.

Notes. Much of the statistical analysis above has been published by David Lucas and Barbara Edgar as online conference papers by the African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific http://afsaap.org.au/
INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION PAYS THE BEST INTEREST

Dr Berhan Ahmed, CEO, African Australian Multicultural Employment and Youth Services (AAMEYS), and Victorian Australian of the Year 2009

Dr Berhan Ahmed, is an adjunct Professor at the University of Melbourne, Faculty of Science, and holds a PhD in forestry from University of Melbourne, Australia. Dr Ahmed is currently a member of Australia Africa University network; ex-board member of the Australian Multicultural Education Services (AMES), and ex-chairperson of the African Think Tank in Australia. Through his work and communication across the academic, government and community domains, at the University of Melbourne and CSIRO as social advocate on refugees, particularly African refugees Dr Ahmed became well-known in Australia. Together with recognition as Victorian Australian of the Year in 2009 and being the first African Australian to stand as a senate candidate in 2004, his contributions to Australian society has earned him respect of mainstream Australians and around the world. He has co-supervised several postgraduate students and published articles extensively in mainstream media, academic journals and conferences with over 120 articles. Currently, Dr Ahmed is a board member of the Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre and CEO of African Australian Multicultural Employment and Youth Services.

Australia has welcomed many refugees and migrants from all over the world over many decades—most recently, refugees from war-torn regions in Africa. The African Australian community thanks Australian governments of various persuasions for allowing us to come to a country of mostly peace, tolerance and generosity.

We do recognise that Australian taxpayers fund the services that help migrants and refugees to get on their feet in their new country, especially education, health services and basic social security. We are very grateful for that assistance. A refugee teenager mother said, ‘Arm juvenile youth with education to prevent future violence’.

The African Australian Multicultural Employment and Youth Services (AAMEYS) wants to bring one area to the attention of the government where more targeted focus and funding is needed to help our young people get the opportunities to succeed and realise their potential in Australia. The area needing more attention is education, particularly at primary and secondary schools; ‘the foundation of every state is the education of its youth’ (Quote from Diogenes).

Many young migrants from Africa, especially refugees, have had limited, if any, education, before reaching safety in Australia. The education of many has been hampered by lack of schooling opportunities and, for some, disrupted by forced displacement. So many African Australians of school age are starting from well behind scratch at Australian schools. In some instances, young African refugees are not encouraged to learn to their full potential; rather, they are encouraged to leave school and get a job—although jobs are almost non-existent for people who lack education in the knowledge and service economy.
Let us give you a couple of examples of where some schools are not succeeding:

Amanuale was born in Ethiopia and has been in Australia for seven years. He did complete his secondary schooling and has nearly finished a degree in International Relations at Victoria University. He well remembers a major issue at his school: students who were not from the Australian mainstream culture, and they were the majority, were pressured by the school not to aim to complete Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), but rather take up a TAFE course or get a job. That pressure by some teachers was discriminatory, thinking that young people from some cultural backgrounds cannot go on to higher education and the professions.

Ahmed is of Somali background and is two years into his course of Software Engineering at RMIT. He experienced the same problem at school. They were treated differently because they were ‘different’ from ‘mainstream Australians’ and not encouraged to go on to VCE, seemingly categorised as without the ability to succeed in education. In these examples, African Australians are not seen as individuals, but as members of a group culture that is ‘too difficult’ to educate.

AAMEYS has received many similar messages: some schools are treating many of our young people as ‘extra problems’ and put in the ‘too hard’ basket. This lack of attention to the needs of minority cultural groups is directly feeding the situation where too many young African Australians are not getting the education and socialisation needed to make a contribution to society. They are leaving school early because ‘the system’ does not have the resources and the skills required to deal with young people who aren’t mainstream. So they don’t learn the rules and cultural norms and behaviours of mainstream Australia. Without education, they can’t get a job— even if they want a job. They are marginalised. Their cultural background has barely been touched by Australian education.

Some turn to antisocial behaviour, such as drugs and crime. It becomes easier to join a gang of like-minded young people, however short-term that might last. They become oblivious to social norms. But there are ‘would-be offenders’ and criminals in any culture. The presence of antisocial behavior in the African community is used by some sections of the media as a slur on African Australians youth in general.

We know that funding for education is limited, and that there are many competing interests and needs. But there can be no greater need than that of a welcoming school environment for young people brought to Australia who come from different cultural backgrounds and sometimes carry fraught and violent histories. What we call for is more focus on and funding for the education of our young people, many in need of close attention to bring them into mainstream society, not left on the margins where they are liable to break society’s rules. Learning at home—if they have family—can never be anywhere near enough. It’s the days at school that count most for young African Australians to learn, how to integrate and how to prosper.

Education is essential for later employment— both the training in itself and the socialisation and learning of cultural norms. Getting and holding down a job means young people can be financially independent, not living off welfare benefits which are likely to be harder to come by. Getting and holding down a job—and getting a better job when the opportunity arises—means being able to work in the way that businesses want and expect. It’s known as work culture.

All countries and communities have a work culture. Hours and days of work vary, and so do such benefits as holidays and insurance coverage. The mainstream ‘Australian Work Culture’ is often different from the work culture where many of Australia’s migrants come from. Of course, migrant businesses can keep to their own work traditions if it suits their clients— as long as they don’t break Australian law. But it’s not hard to fit into the mainstream Australian work culture if you are genuine about starting a successful working life with all the benefits that brings.
The Australian work culture reflects the main values that the mainstream of Australia holds, which includes tolerance of other cultures that people bring when they settle in Australia. The main pillars of work behaviour are respect for the worth and dignity of fellow workers and equality of opportunity no matter what gender, marital status, religion, nationality, disability or sexual preference employees have. One work issue in Australia probably tops all others in importance—getting to work on time. Most businesses work for certain hours, and so do their workers. That will be the prime ingredient in the agreement made between the employer and the employee. For an employee, work is not ‘when I feel like it’. It’s when the boss wants to do business, make a profit and be able to pay you for your work. The first rule of any employment contract is that if you can’t get to work on time, you give your employer as much warning as you can. If you neglect to do that, your job will be at risk—rightly so if you continue to not get to work on time. Same with leaving work if there is a pressing need.

The majority of Australian workplaces—but not all—are often less hierarchical (less ‘bossy’) and more easy-going than workplaces elsewhere. Here are a few examples of how Australian workplaces can differ a lot from work in other countries:

- Asking questions if you don’t understand something. This is different to most other cultures, where the boss is viewed as a person of authority who has more wisdom than employees, and employees must show total respect by not bothering the boss. Australian employers want to help you learn and understand so that you can do a good job.
- Trying to do the work you are given—and a bit extra to show you are keen. When someone asks an Australian to do an extra task at work, they will usually take on the extra work and not say they are too busy to do it. If you say that you are too busy, your co-workers or boss will assume that you cannot handle the workload.
- It’s OK to disagree with someone at work—carefully and with respect. Alternative opinions might help the business work better.
- Australians say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ a lot, even when someone is just doing their job, like a waiter or a shop assistant. This is because in Australian culture, it is important to show respect.

The Australian workplace is increasingly diverse. More than 40% of Australians were born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas. Diversity also extends to marital status, gender, sexual preference and age. This does not apply to all workplaces. There are still some industry sectors or work settings which are very homogenous.

School-age African Australians need encouragement to learn, and continue to learn and be trained to achieve their potential, to be accepted into mainstream society. This needs skilled and sympathetic educators, working with a mindset that every student should have equal opportunity to succeed.

African Australians cannot integrate and contribute to Australian society if the education doors don’t open wider. A University lecturer at a university in South Africa wrote an expressive message to his students at doctorate, masters and bachelors level and placed it at the college entrance. This was his message:

‘Collapsing any Nation does not require use of Atomic bombs or the use of Long range missiles. But it requires lowering the quality of Education and allowing cheating in the exams by the students.

The patient dies in the hands of the doctor who passed his exams through cheating.

And the buildings collapse in the hands of an engineer who passed his exams through cheating.

And the money is lost in the hands of an accountant who passed his exams through cheating.

And humanity dies in the hands of a religious scholar who passed his exams through cheating.

And justice is lost in the hands of a judge who passed his exams through cheating.

And ignorance is rampant in the minds of children who are under the care of a teacher who passed exams through cheating.

The collapse of education is the collapse of the Nation.’
I arrived in Australia in June 2001 and two years later I received a letter inviting me to become a citizen of Australia. I was so excited with the offer and wasted no time undertaking the process which was straightforward and simple. It was like a dream come true considering all that I had been through fleeing war and enduring a displaced life with an uncertain future for years. It felt like winning the lottery the day my name was affixed in the noticeboard at the United Nation’s High Commission for refugees in Guinea Conakry. I literally danced with joy, a feeling shared by many people from Africa migrating to Australia.

I arrived in Adelaide, South Australia, not knowing anyone but I felt welcomed and was very optimistic about the future. When I got my citizenship I was over the moon, I felt safe and secure and looked forward to the future with hope. Like most other African migrants I know, I went straight to University, graduated and have since been doing my best to make ends meet and give back to the Australian community.

Sixteen years later I’d say things are not the way they used to be for prospective Australian citizens whom I believe for the most part, look forward to that great opportunity. The hurdles and hoops one
has to go through to become a citizen has gradually intensified over the years and just recently, in April this year, the Prime Minister proposed further changes to the Australian citizenship laws in order to assess migrants’ commitment to Australia and their attitudes on religious freedom and gender equality.

The reasons for these stringent measures are an open secret. Three months after my arrival in Australia, in September of 2001, terrorists attacked the twin tower buildings in New York killing thousands of people from all walks of life. This tragedy marked a turning point in the fate of people seeking refuge in western societies. Further world events have later succeeded in breeding mistrust against people from Muslim background no matter the country they are coming from, so through no fault of mine I find myself at odds with my adoptive country for what others from my background have done or potentially can do. In addition to that, criminal activities by people from migrant background are in the spotlight, stoking anti-immigrant sentiments.

I must say it is understandable that people in my adoptive country are worried, scared and concerned for their safety. The more these attacks occur, the more the divide widens prompting different responses from mainstream Australian society. While most people tend to show restraint in their judgement and blame casting, others have publicly made their thoughts felt, some even calling for bans on migration from Muslim and African countries. To make matters worse, certain politicians and some media have used the prevailing predicament as a rallying point to woo supporters and increase ratings.

This difficult situation many African Australians face is indeed a cause for concern and begs the question of what can we do to be considered a loyal Australian? Will words suffice to convince those in doubt that I love this country and wish it no harm? What can I do about this dilemma?

In as much as I understand those in doubt about where my loyalty is coming from, I’d like to appeal to their reason and to consider all the obstacles and hurdles we have been through as refugees to get here and also look at all the positive contributions the majority of people from these countries are making to the Australian society.

It can be confusing to be expected to be a loyal Australian citizen while at the same time considered a foreigner. Let’s take the recent backlash that African Australian Yassmin Abdel-Magied faced for her comment about the plight of refugees in Australian detention centers. While it was the people’s right to express their opposition to her statement and call for her ousting from the ABC, it was totally unfair for some people to ask for her deportation. As an Australian citizen she should face the consequences of her actions, but asking for her to be ‘sent back to her country of origin’ questions the validity of her Australian citizenship status and the Australian Citizenship Act as espoused in the Australian constitution. To strip some dual citizens of their Australian citizenship has also been suggested as we see the rule of law being negated and cast aside giving way to phobia of others in the society.

The reality is, we can’t expect all refugees to be perfect, so instead of demonizing people from refugee backgrounds it would be much better to uphold the rule of law and ensure that before migrating to this country, migrants are fully aware that these are the laws of the land and going against them will incur consequences. I believe equality before the law is all we need as we navigate through these dark times in our history. The only hope we have of emerging unscathed will be by allowing justice to take its course when and where it is necessary.

In general Australia is a beautiful and welcoming country that has provided a lot for its migrant communities and continues to do so. I hope that love for humanity will prevail in the end and we will all work together as one people for a prosperous and stable society.
FROM STATELESS TO CITIZEN—
SETTLEMENT THROUGH OPPORTUNITIES

Nyadol Nyuon

Nyadol Nyuon is a commercial lawyer at Arnold Bloch Leibler, as well as an advocate and writer. She was born and raised in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. At the age of 18, Nyadol moved to Australia as part of Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Victoria University and a Jurist Doctorate (Law) from the University of Melbourne. Nyadol has an interest in humanitarian concerns and has volunteered extensively in that area. She is currently a board member of the Melbourne Social Equity Institute. In both 2011 and 2014, Nyadol was nominated as one of the 100 most influential African Australians.

On my travelling document to Australia, the Entry Visa noted I was stateless. I arrived without a home. I am now a citizen. I am Australian. This drastic change captures how my life has been transformed as a result of resettling in Australia.

Like most South Sudanese persons my age, I was born and raised in refugee camps. I was born in a refugee camp called Itang in Ethiopia. A few years after I was born, the entire population of Itang was displaced by another conflict. We were scattered across Sudan, Uganda and Kenya. Eventually I ended up in Kenya. Years of conflict meant that I knew little of my own country: South Sudan.

In Kenya we lived in Kakuma Refugee camp. My existence and that of my entire family depended on the United Nations (UN), which provided food, medical services, and education at an elementary level. Without the UN my family, many others, and myself would have, without exaggerating, perished.
We arrived in Australia on 15 March 2005. My family and I were excited to start our new lives but as for most refugees, settlement was challenging for us at the time.

A new country, a new language, and a new culture left us confused, overwhelmed and bewildered. We were constructing our lives from the ‘ground up’ with little direction or support. Most families who arrived as refugees were assigned a social worker, but because a distant relative sponsored us, it was expected that the sponsor would assist us in our settlement. We spent only two weeks in our sponsor’s home. From then on we were on our own.

We had to learn basic things like how to use an ATM and how to find our way around the new suburbs. These were minor challenges. Over the years, I watched my mother struggle to find work. She even moved once to Alice Springs to find employment. We also struggled to find a stable home, moving, almost every year, from one rental property to another. Financially, things were hard. We had arrived with nothing but our suitcases of clothing. We had no savings of any kind, and what we received from Centrelink was all we had.

Eventually, my family moved to Ballarat. Ballarat was the only place where we could find public housing and avoid the extensive wait in metropolitan areas.

In Ballarat, we settled in a ‘troubled’ neighbourhood. My family faced daily abuse, most of it racially motivated. For example, an uncle of mine was once threatened with a knife. On a separate occasion, a younger sibling was followed home by kids who threw stones at him and hurled racial abuse. I recall a time when my siblings would avoid using the main footpath to walk to school simply to avoid being confronted. We reported some of the matters to the police. Nothing was done.

Our experiences in Ballarat weren’t entirely negative. My family made new friends who were generous to show us around and to assist us with integrating into the local community.

While my family settled in Ballarat, I remained in Melbourne to complete my final year of high school. The decision to remain behind was, at the time, controversial. For a young Australian woman, it would have been normal to move out for studies; for a South Sudanese woman, it was expected that one left the family home only after marriage. This ‘conflict of identities’ extended to my life outside the home. What did it mean to be African-Australian, or more specifically, South Sudanese Australian? The question of my identity was already a complicated one, reflecting the influence of my migration history. Though I am South Sudanese by ethnicity, I was born in Ethiopia, and grew up in Kenya. Reconciling these cultural influences remains an ongoing struggle. Over the years I have had to learn how to balance these cultural influences, which do not necessarily converge.

Although the ‘conflict of identities’ can make settlement complicated, my experiences suggest that it can also offer opportunities for one to define one’s own pathway. One of the main things I have had to do is to remain vigilant against ‘boxing’ myself into categories assigned to me by others because of my background or gender. One such example occurred when I was in High School. I was discouraged from taking certain subjects because I was new to the country. Instead, I was encouraged to take ‘easy’ subjects, the assumption being that I
would struggle if I took on something that was more challenging. I suspect that the teacher meant well, and I assume that they did not want me to struggle in school. But this approach meant that I was not evaluated individually, and it meant that any strength I had was overlooked. Despite this, I managed to get a score that qualified me for a position at Victoria University where I completed a Bachelor of Arts in 2009.

On a personal level, I have needed to be aware of those limits that I impose on myself out of fear or as a result of internalising stereotypes about ‘people like me’. As a minority, it is not only easy to internalise stereotypes, but with few visible role models, it can be hard to challenge them. For this reason I sought out challenges and forced myself to do things of which I was scared. It was partly this mindset that caused me to apply to study law at the University of Melbourne. It was ambitious and I did not think I would be successful. I completed my Juris Doctor at the University of Melbourne in 2014. On 10 May 2016, I was admitted to the legal profession as an Australian lawyer. Now, I work for one of Australia’s leading commercial law firms, Arnold Bloch Leibler. I have achieved my long held dream of becoming a lawyer, the roots of which I trace back to Kakuma.

I commenced my legal career at a time when the South Sudanese community was facing an increasing degree of media scrutiny. This was brought about because of the criminal conduct of a few, albeit notorious, groups of young men. To some extent, the media exaggerates the issues experienced by my community. As clarified by more balanced media sources, a ‘large cohort’ of the Apex gang was ‘in fact Australian-born offenders’. Despite this, I am often asked why my path followed such a drastically different trajectory to that of these young men. I do not have the answer to this question. The premise of this question is also wrong. It supposes that successful integration means none of us can fail. This is an unrealistic expectation. A further problem with this question is that it draws attention away from the many achievements of individuals in the South Sudanese Australian community. In fact my story is not unique.

There are many stories of success in the South Sudanese community. To name a few: Dr Garang Dut (MD 2014) was recently awarded the prestigious Roth/Segal John Monash Harvard Scholarship, one of the most important postgraduate scholarships available in Australia. Another story is of Yong Deng, a resident pharmacist. As I write this article, Kot Monoah (a fellow Melbourne lawyer) has been announced as the winner of the Law Institute of Victoria’s Rising Star Award. And these examples are only the beginning: many South Sudanese Australians are buying homes, some are small business owners and others are making their way towards professional roles across the country. Considering that the South Sudan community, on average, has been around for just over a decade, these are considerable strides for a new and emerging community. I believe that with the right support and a bit more time, we will see the South Sudanese community thrive and flourish, as was the case for many communities before us.
A sense of belonging is vital for a successful integration process as well as for social cohesion. However, these ideas are often discussed with regard to the dominant culture where the focus is on ‘Australian values’, ‘fitting in’, and ‘common identity’. Social cohesion is, in these contexts, based on a discussion of homogeneity rather than diversity and complexity.

This article looks at the concepts of integration and belonging with a group of South Sudanese former refugees in Canberra. My research illustrated the complexities behind integration processes and provided an insight into how belonging is entwined with experiences of self, identity and participation in the Australian society. The development of a sense of belonging is closely linked to experiences of recognition, participation, and contribution and of mutual understandings of expectations.

Linked to belonging is the aspect of longing—longing to belong in the new country and longing back to home country and to ‘how things used to be’, a longing for meaning. One question that often arose in the research was whether longing can sometimes become stronger than belonging and limit people’s desire to socially engage. Belonging is ‘innate to human need’ and ‘belonging and recognition can help individuals addressing negative personal effects and assist society in achieving integration, mutual support and cohesion’. However, even if belonging is innate, it remains something people must work at: ‘feeling part of society, the local area, politics or the economy is a challenge for many—not always because of a lack of will but sometimes due to a lack of occasion for contact or ability to participate’. Further, while longing for home and how things used to be is not necessarily a negative thing, memories and nostalgic feelings can often promote a strong sense of self and a sense of connection with the new world, yet at other times memories can hinder participation in the new country, promote a more passive behaviour and loss of interest in time and place.
In general, in my research, men and women had different experiences with the development of a sense of belonging. Most of the men in my study were young students and spoke English perfectly. Being in the middle or at the end of their education also meant that they had hopes for the future; hopes for a job, a house and, for many, to eventually bring their wife and children to Australia. The women in my study were mostly full-time mothers, unemployed, and, with some exceptions, had limited English skills. While many of the women did express a sense of isolation and longing to back home based on lack of opportunities and participation, others demonstrated a greater sense of belonging and hope for a future in Australia. These differences came down to their experiences and links with the Australian society in the way of English skills, employment, education and citizenship. In a great degree, this research demonstrated the importance of social networks, participation, recognition and experiences of contribution as essential in the development of a sense of belonging.

One of the men explained how a chain of belonging strengthened his sense of self and self-esteem through increased social contacts, especially the bridges and the links he developed to the receiving society. Also important was his hope of future employment. As a student, he developed relations with other students as well as with fellow employees in his part-time job. Language acquisition eased his process of settlement and a feeling of belonging:

I give credit to the language because without the language I would I would never be able to get friends... I had an employment agent, my employment agent became a friend because I could understand what she said and she could understand what I wanted and from there I think I got my first paid job and then I actually worked hard to help people back. (South Sudanese male)

His experiences of freedom with regards to opportunities and being able to plan a future in Australia had a positive impact on his sense of belonging: Coming here I have an opportunity to you know...have a vision of what I want to become in the future. (South Sudanese male)

For most of the men it was exactly these opportunities that they perceived Australia to provide that helped them in the settlement period. Another man, with work experience both before and during his university degree, also focused on the economic opportunities that Australia provided: The opportunities here, the opportunities to study and make something out of yourself, and...and build a career, there is great potential for that here. There are two opportunities here in Canberra that really makes me want to stay, and that is employment and education. (South Sudanese male)

This was echoed by a third man in the research: The thing is, there is a lot of information, like if I want to go to school I can get information, somebody can direct me, if I want to go for a job I have some people to contact...it is really simple things, like if I want to do something it is not that hard, that is why I feel settled because I find these things here. (South Sudanese male)

For many of the women it was a different situation. The difficulties associated with language impacted on the women’s self-esteem and the way they experienced their own worth in the society: Language is a problem, if you don’t have the language then you can’t do anything, you can’t work, you can’t go anywhere. It is good to sort of get a job and then understand what the job is saying, to read papers and instructions and...but if you don’t really read English or speak English it is hard, you can’t follow anything up...so language is a big barrier. (South Sudanese woman)

Many women also commented on how language impeded all other aspects of everyday life: because there is no chance of getting a job because of English, you cannot work, you cannot change your life and it is not settlement. (South Sudanese woman)
The men often expressed experiences of hope and a longing to belong in Australia through employment and bringing their family over. This hope in the future was based on experiences of participation in Australian society through education and through developing relations with the receiving society. Women expressed more often a longing for their life back home.

*I think this country is very stressful, like in Africa I never had the stress … I don’t feel stressed, I don’t feel pressured … life was easy, ‘peasy’ and you can just do whatever you can and if you don’t have enough it doesn’t matter you can just…your brain is free.* (South Sudanese woman)

Two different kinds of longing were identified in my research—longing for their home country (here expressed as nostalgia) and the longing to belong in the new country. While my research demonstrated in many ways a longing to belong, this was mostly among men who had already established bridges and to a certain degree links with Australia and therefore expressed a hope in the future. Women in my research expressed a much stronger longing for South Sudan, back to what was known and familiar and to a place where they experienced a certain degree of control over their own lives—in spite of frequent gratitude to the safety and security that Australia provided.

This longing back for was known negatively influenced self-image and self-esteem among many participants through heightening the sense that they didn’t belong: *In Africa, you would be proud of yourself, you would be happy of yourself, life...like in this country now, I feel that I am in a free country but I still feel like I am not free for some reason, I feel that something is holding me apart, I feel that I don’t belong to this place.* (South Sudanese woman)

Another woman, who did speak English and was studying, reflected on the difficulties being understood by the authorities: *the authorities, like everything you have...if something happens, something insecure and you report it, they are really slow, yes. And sometimes there is little understanding of other cultures so it makes you feel the hard work sometimes when those situations come you feel like you want to cry...Like there is no trust, they don’t trust us, they might think you are making it up...I am not sure...it’s what mostly happens yes...* (South Sudanese woman)

Frustrations, worries and lack of trust towards Australian social institutions impacted negatively on the women’s sense of belonging, amplifying their difference with the wider Australian society. Furthermore, these frustrations are exaggerated by the absence of links to service institutions. Their self-esteem was diminished and their negative experience of integration through limited English skills and cultural knowledge led to a weak sense of belonging often due to a sense of lack of control over one’s environment. This exaggerated this nostalgia for home.

Recent discussions in Australia on proposed changes to the citizenship test where people have to demonstrate they have integrated through employment, engagement in the society, increased English skills and commitment to Australian values, miss the very important aspect of the citizenship as a dual process where both rights and obligations are secured. With obligations come responsibilities, both from the community and the government. The government’s responsibilities to provide opportunities and support throughout the settlement and integration process must not be overlooked—support through recognition, opportunities and resources.

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1 All work is based on my Doctoral research: Wille, Janecke: *‘A tree is not a tree without its leaves…’: Exploring Integration and Belonging among South Sudanese Australians in Canberra.* Australian National University, March 2014
2 Buonfino, A 2007, *Belonging in Contemporary Britain*, Department of Communities and Local Government
3 Buonfino, A 2007, *Belonging in Contemporary Britain*, Department of Communities and Local Government
Ms Agok Martin Majier is a Recruitment Coordinator who is passionate about gender equality and African Australian integration. When my parents found out that my mother was pregnant, they discussed what my name would be. They agreed to name me Agok, after my paternal grandmother whom my father had been very close to and who had perished in 1991. This conversation took place in South Sudan, in a prison where my father was held captive as a political prisoner. I have two older sisters and two of us were conceived in prison. Shortly after I was born, it was decided that I would also be called Tabu. It is a name given to children born in particularly difficult circumstances as it loosely translates to struggle. Our circumstances were particularly difficult due to my father being assassinated three weeks before I was born. We heard news of his death when my mother and I arrived in Nairobi, Kenya to join my older sisters. Mom had sent them to Nairobi as South Sudan was too dangerous and she feared for our lives. I love my name Agok as it makes me feel closer to my father and grandmother.

My family moved from Nairobi, Kenya to Sydney, Australia in August 2003 when I was 10 years old. I am now 24 years old, thus, I have spent the majority of my life here. For the first few weeks in Sydney, my senses were heightened. I was very aware of the different smells and colours. It was also very cold compared to the weather in Nairobi. I was aware of the confusion around me as we got Medicare cards, bank cards, looked for a house and applied for Centrelink. It was when applying for a Medicare card that I first realised my name had been misspelt in our official paperwork. Instead of being Agok, I was suddenly now Agot. The man who had assisted us in filling out our application hadn’t bothered to refer to details my mother had provided. Instead of being born on the 11th of February 1993 as stated in my birth certificate, I was officially recorded as being born on the 01st of April 1993. My mother explained that it had been difficult changing the discrepancies she had noticed when we were in Kenya. I had initially been recorded as a male, she insisted for that to be changed. She tried to correct our information but it was not well received and there was always the threat that our process could be delayed or cancelled altogether. In the context of settling down and starting our lives in a new country, correcting these discrepancies was not high on the priority list.
Starting school was a fairly easy process as we already spoke English and I was able to pick up where I left off. I was in class 5 in Nairobi and continued school in year 5 in Sydney. It was difficult being the only dark-skinned African at the school. I made a group of friends who were of Southeast Asian backgrounds however most of the children did not know how to socialise with me. I was the new kid at school who had a different accent and I looked drastically different. I was already used to responding to bullies as I was called names for my dark complexion in Nairobi. This skill became more important in year 7 where once again I was the darkest person in the school. I was stared at everyday and was always made aware that I was different. Initially, as I was the only visibly black African at school, I often had to respond to ignorant questions about Africa and assumptions about my upbringing. This got easier as more African students enrolled and the other students became accustomed to our presence.

The schools used my birth certificate to determine my identity so I was able to be Agok Martin Majier born on the 11th of February 1993. My other identity didn’t become a problem until I had to acquire a Tax File Number to start my first job. I could no longer ignore the fact that I had two identities. I had to remember to be Agok at school and Agot at work. I had numerous embarrassing conversations with public service employees where I was asked to verify my identity and I would forget and give the wrong birth date. They looked perplexed when I corrected myself, providing my officially recognised birthdate. It became more embarrassing when colleagues tried to celebrate my birthday on the 1st of April and I had to explain my circumstances.

I went to university where I was enrolled through my school details as Agok born on the 11th of February. I began the process of trying to change my legal name and date of birth only to realise my birth certificate had been lost at some point between starting year 9 and finishing high school. I could only find a certified copy of the birth certificate. I therefore continued living the two identities, one for university and home and the other for work. As I got closer to graduating, I started thinking about the potential consequences of having a degree with details that weren’t legally recognised. I wondered how I would be able to prove that I am both Agok and Agot. I made a compromise and convinced the university that there had been an error with my birth date and I wasn’t born on the 11th of February, I was born on the 01st of April. It was a difficult decision as I wanted my real identity to be recognised. I am not Agot, my name is Agok, I am not an Aries, I am an Aquarius. This effort was purely to show a connection between Agok and Agot, in case I ever had to show my degree. At this stage in my life Agok Martin Majier born on the 01st of April holds a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Commercial Law, Agot Martin Majier born on the 01st of April works as a Recruitment Coordinator and I am Agok Martin Majier born on the 11th of February to my friends and family.

I am fortunate that the most difficult part of becoming an Australian is giving up part of my identity. I am aware that innumerable refugees have had a harder time. My life in Australia has been great and Australia is my home. I was fortunate as I had a good standard of education and understood English upon arrival. This made it easier to interact with others, complete my education and secure employment. I have a stable and supportive network of family, friends and a great work environment. In many ways I feel like every other Australian. As I grew up here, I have not had to worry that I will not gain employment because I have a foreign accent. As a South Sudanese Australian woman, I have not been accused of being part of a gang for spending time with a group of friends. As a black woman, I don’t have to worry about being stereotyped as violent and dangerous like my male counterparts. As an Australian citizen, I don’t have to worry that making a mistake and going to prison would mean that I would be deported to a country I have never lived in.
So much has been written about African Australian youth and much more about those who came to Australia as refugees. Much of the narrative is negative; about crime, delinquency and gangs. It does not help that in June 2014, the Australia Bureau of Statistics found that in Victoria, persons born in Sudan had the highest imprisonment rate (701.6 prisoners per 100,000 adult population born in Sudan) even though the numbers are low at 131. Reviewing both online and media conversations would lead one to a mistaken conclusion that African Australian youth are criminals who are headed nowhere else but jail. Trying to bring about balanced reporting, others are careful to state that even though most young people in the youth justice system have been found to come from ‘troubled’ backgrounds, many with similar backgrounds don’t ever end up in youth justice services demonstrating that they have somehow built resilience.

These types of discussions have led to articles like that authored by Kathryn Daley a Lecturer at RMIT University, and Stuart Thomas a Professor at RMIT University titled ‘How resilience can break the link between a ‘bad’ childhood and the youth justice system’. In the article, they state that resilience can be learned and fostered as it is a process of adaptation.

Which leads to the questions, are we doing enough to foster resilience in the African Australian youth? And what else needs to be done to turn the tide and move them away from the door of the justice system? I am focussing on the youth because youth are easily impressionable both positively and negatively. And if negatively impressed this can lead to an intergenerational cycle of crime.

I am not unaware of the many challenges that these young people face on a daily basis. Challenges such as poverty, low incomes, unemployment, low English proficiency, ‘run-ins’ with the law, racism, discrimination and stereotyping, social isolation in terms of participation, lack of frequent, positive intercultural contact, lack of equality of access to resources, little ability to communicate confidently with
other community members and a lack of mentoring and leadership development for community capacity-building. However, these challenges provide us with ample opportunities as well:

- improve the effectiveness of strategies currently in use to build community resilience and foster social cohesion within the Australian community
- affect young people safeguarding their life outlook and thereby reducing the proportions of African Australian prisoner population
- change the perceptions of African Australians and Australians’ perspectives on multiculturalism and living with diversity and preventing the possibility of ‘failed’ communities
- provide community activities and ‘social spaces’ that can enhance the likelihood of positive intercultural interaction and enhance community belonging.

Many interventions currently exist addressing the different causes and outcomes. Some are looking at how to increase the skills of these youth, for example English proficiency or job skills. Others are focussing on general knowledge, such as the rights and responsibilities of being a productive Australian. All these are aimed to build skills and knowledge of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in the domains of economic, social and civic participation and personal wellbeing. What I have yet not come across are those that are aimed at increasing and inspiring self-confidence and increasing the social networks of these young people.

Envisaging the opportunities that abound should energise us to come up with proactive interventions that are holistic rather than piecemeal. I propose that such a program should comprise three elements namely 1) inspire self-confidence, 2) build networks to increase social capital and provide positive intercultural interaction and enhance community belonging, 3) engender accountability and demonstrate the negative consequences of one’s actions.

I strongly believe that a lack of strong role models has been instrumental in getting us to where we find ourselves and that mentoring and leadership development for community capacity-building will go a long way towards increasing inclusion and participation which are factors that lead to positive social behaviours. Leadership development has been demonstrated to be effective in inspiring and developing self-confidence while mentoring provides both the much-needed positive role models, while providing networks and explaining to many who have previously been excluded how society works and assisting them to navigate the system. The system which is often not only new, but confusing as well as overwhelming! Additionally, leadership development courses, especially those that focus on rights and responsibilities, are useful in engendering accountability.

I also propose that such program should be focused on high school kids because the Middle Years of schooling are significant in terms of the growth and development that occurs as students move from childhood to adulthood. It is during this phase that values and attitudes are formed and refined based on their experiences.

Critical to the success of such a program would be:

- a) stakeholder support, all hands should be on deck—parents, schools, the state which should allocate budget and society role models whose involvement will provide the sought-after networks
- b) extended reach, such programs should pervasive, almost becoming the way we do things here to be effective and gain legitimacy
- c) enriching and engaging and facilitate pathways for learner advancement so that it is seen as a stepping stone to greater life possibilities.

I know that I am not the only one who finds the status quo not acceptable and that many are looking at ways to turn this tide back. My call is for those who are currently involved in programs to support the African Australian communities to look at how they can implement such holistic approaches including working together rather than in silos. My other call is to those who are positive role models to get more involved especially in organised mentoring programs. If we do this, I believe that in 10 years we will see African Australian youth who are self-confident, engaged in communities both socially and economically, and making positive news headlines!
Atem Atem is member of the South Sudanese community and currently lives in Sydney. He came to Australia in 2002. Atem was this year’s winner of the John Gibson Memorial Grant which enabled him to travel to Geneva to advocate on behalf of refugee communities in Australia. His advocacy at the UNHCR in Geneva focused on self-representation; i.e. refugees must influence decisions and policies and gain some control over their daily lives. Atem is the inaugural Public Officer of Refugee Communities Advocacy Network (RCAN) in NSW. RCAN seeks to give refugees and their communities a voice at the highest level possible. Atem is currently writing a PhD thesis on the settlement of Sudanese in Western Sydney and he works for the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors. He will shortly be taking up a position at Fairfield City Council in the Division of Social and Cultural Development.

One of the most challenging areas in settlement is finding ways to engage young people. African young people, like other young people with migrant backgrounds, are no exception. Most of the time young people with migrant backgrounds are misunderstood and as a result their potential for creativity and innovation in resolving their settlement dilemmas are not recognised. Refugee young people, like other refugees, bring with them useful skills and experiences that they can employ to negotiate the settlement process.

Sports play an important role in the process of settlement for African young people. In Sydney and Melbourne, for example, South Sudanese young people participated in sports activities as soon as they arrived in Australia. In the early 2000s, before the role of sports in settlement was recognised, South Sudanese young people established basketball and soccer teams. South Sudanese young people participated in sports before they came to Australia inspired by American NBA and the English Premier League. In refugee camps in Kenya and in cities like Cairo in Egypt, South Sudanese young people trained and played basketball and soccer. In the case of refugee camps in Kenya, talented South Sudanese young people successfully obtained mentorships that opened their eyes to the importance of sports and gave them useful skills in sportsmanship.
In Sydney, hundreds of South Sudanese young people participate in soccer and basketball every weekend. Initially, South Sudanese young people struggled to find support. They found out that it was almost impossible to find a field where they could play the games they love. Sometimes local city councils allowed them to use the fields at heavily subsidised cost or for free. Over time, South Sudanese young people became more organised and began to advocate on the importance of sports in the process of settlement. They had to build relationships with local councils, settlement service providers, government agencies and sports organisations. In Melbourne, the situation was the same. Self-organisation, advocacy, and building relationships enabled South Sudanese young people to demonstrate that sports can contribute positively to the settlement process especially in building social capital. Now, the role of sports in the settlement process is understood and embraced.

South Sudanese young people in Sydney use sports to create important opportunities for them to engage with family and education in a positive way. The Savannah Pride is a good example. The philosophy of Savannah Pride understands sports as a community building process that brings together parents, participating young people (the players) and the community to support the education of young people through provision of mentorship and role models. Emphasis in this process is on discipline. Young people must learn discipline that they apply to their school work and their daily life. The philosophy places parents and community at the centre so that the players (participating young people) treat parents and community with respect. The result is that young people build positive relationships with parents and loved ones and at the same time contribute positively to the wider community.

The philosophy of the Savannah Pride is represented by a tree. At the roots of the tree are the parents, young people and members of the sports organisation. The trunk of the tree represents the community as it brings together parents, young people and the sporting community. The philosophy also understands that when young people are disciplined and work hard, they get rewarded. The leaves of the Savannah Pride tree symbolise achieving dreams. Savannah Pride has sent about a dozen young people from Sydney to the United States through scholarships to play basketball and to attend American educational institutions.
South Sudanese young people have recently made inroads into Australian Football League, AFL. Majak Daw of North Melbourne and Alier Alier of Sydney Swan lead the way. They are followed by a dozen of emerging South Sudanese young people in the AFL. The success of these South Sudanese young people in making inroads in the AFL speaks volumes about the role of sports in building strong connections to the wider community and to finding a sense of belonging in Australia. AFL is Australia’s own creation and in the psyche of many Australians, the sport holds significant national symbolism. AFL matches are the highlight of national Australian commemorations.

One issue that remains unresolved is lack of gender diversity among South Sudanese young people who participate in sports. This lack of gender diversity in sports generally in Australia is a current topical issue and some good work is being done, for example the establishment of an AFL league for females. For the South Sudanese and the majority of African communities in Australia, sport is perceived as a male activity and sports take a masculine character. Young female South Sudanese may wish to participate, and they do participate in some sports at school, but they are discouraged from participation by family, community or peers as time goes on. They also lack sports role models. Female South Sudanese didn’t have the time to participate in sports in first countries of asylum and therefore didn’t develop the skills needed to organise sports and participate in it. They were busy by taking care of the family whereas the boys were kept busy by playing sports. There is a need for African communities to find ways to mobilise resources for their young people to continue developing sports and to encourage females to participate in sports to ensure that they benefit from sports like the boys have done.

The challenge for South Sudanese and African young people, in general, is to not only find a way to mobilise resources to enable them to participate in some form of sports but also to come up with a sports philosophy that integrate family, community, education, and career opportunities that are rewarding.

The solution to the challenges identified above may include African community groups developing fund raising strategies for sports or approaching established sports organisations such as AFL or soccer’s A-League to provide in kind support such as access to venues, facilities and trainers. Local councils can also assist by allowing access to sports facilities they manage. Female participation in sports in African communities can be improved by changing community attitudes towards female participation in sports. This can be done through establishing sports ambassadors who are members of the community to advocate for female participation in sports. For example, successful sports personalities such as Majak Dau in the Sudanese community could spearhead such a campaign.

Acknowledgement
I would like to acknowledge and thank Mayor Chagai for inviting me to attend one of his basketball training sessions in Sydney last year and for giving me an overview of how the Savannah Pride started and evolved over time. Without his wisdom, this article would be lacking in depth.
I used to go out drinking a lot and wondered why I kept coming back with scars.”

Autiak Aweetek 2016 (Be a Brother participant).

Scars are an important part of the story of the Be a Brother project. There are two kinds of scars in this story; faded scars from long ago, like thin shards of memory of a brutal conflict zone, and fresh scars still red and raised, from repeated exposure to race-based discrimination here in Australia.

I write this account of the Be a Brother project from the standpoint of a white, female, middle class, arts and health practitioner. I have discussed this article with the group of young men who drove the project and have permission to include their reflections.

The Be a Brother project was developed by a group of young men from South Sudanese, Ugandan and Burundian backgrounds in partnership with cohealth Arts Generator. cohealth is one of Australia’s largest community health organisations. The project was inspired by ongoing conversations between the Arts Generator team and young African Australian men who access our programs. It is important to note
that these conversations took place over several years, and that the Arts Generator team includes arts workers that are from African communities. Without this long-term engagement and a workforce that represents this community, I don’t believe these conversations would have ever taken place. It was clear from these exchanges that alcohol consumption is a significant problem for some members of this community. The factors behind this alcohol use are complex and nuanced. It was also clear that a top-down educative approach would not provide the solution. The young men believed that the solution lay in the same process as identifying the problem: sustained and respectful dialogue.

Building a culture of support between young men to help each other to drink less became the central idea for the project which can be seen as both a health promotion and a community development project. This idea drew on a key strength within this community that is the strong bond they feel with each other and respect for those who they see as in the same predicament as they are.

The project commenced with a series of focus groups with young men from the target communities. These informal sessions were opportunities for dialogue around experiences with alcohol. The lived experiences from these sessions became the basis for three short films that became the centre piece for a social media campaign. Each of these films follow the story of a young man struggling with an alcohol issue that is affecting his relationships with his peers and his family. The central character has traumatic memories from experiences of war, and is trapped between a traditional African family structure and the alcohol-soaked culture of Australia. A caring ‘brother’ consistently supports him even when he rejects his friend’s offers.

The collaborative style of filmmaking employed to create these works, played a major role in bringing the project to life by starting dialogue in the community. The filmmaking crew was a combination of African and non-African Australians, the cast were all local African actors and community members, and in one of the films the actors spoke the Dinka language with subtitles. Over 50 young people took part in the shooting of the films. The films were launched with a live event that attracted over 200 community members. The launch event went much longer than expected because of the large number of young people present who wanted to have a public conversation about the project and the issues it raised.

The films and a series of memes were released on social media and the campaign asked young men to register as ‘brothers’. Registered ‘brothers’ began receiving SMS text messages every Friday and Saturday night at 7pm reminding them to drink less and look after each other. These messages are written by the peer mentors in the text language used by their group and have been continued for more than a year beyond the project funding’s official end. The messages have had a much greater impact than anyone in the team predicted with ‘brothers’ reporting that the text messages can be a game changer in terms of how much they drink.
It is not an overstatement to say that this group of young men are demonised in the Australian media. The repeated reporting in the Victorian media about the so-called ‘Apex’ gang continues to do damage to this group and this is evident in the high levels of calls currently being made to police about young Africans gathering in or just moving through public space.

When the Be a Brother project staged a public conversation about young men’s consumption of alcohol at a community hub in Melbourne’s West, South Sudanese mothers were invited as panellists and audience members. They reported that many of their sons began drinking during their secondary education in connection to experiencing race-based discrimination at school. Recently, a worker from another agency informed me that a number of schools in Melbourne’s outer west were finding it very difficult to place year 10 African students in work experience. The most recent study done by the Scanlon Foundation titled ‘Australians Today’ has found that it is South Sudanese Australians that report experiencing the highest levels of racism in this country.

Ez Eldin Deng, the lead filmmaker on the project believes that initiatives like Be a Brother offer a counter narrative to the kind of demonization and stigma experienced by young African men in Australia. ‘Young African men and cohealth Arts Generator set out to support young people to drink less and erase the stigma in the Australian community. We want to set a new pathway for our generation and show that we have more to offer others. We want to build collective self-esteem while decreasing alcohol consumption’ (Deng, 2015).

The approach used for the Be a Brother project can be termed ‘co-design’ and this is central to the ethos of cohealth as an organisation. At the heart of ‘co-design’ is real dialogue that supports meaningful input into project design and implementation. I believe another critical element is the willingness on behalf of organisations to relinquish some control and allow communities to chart a new path into their own health and wellbeing.

An evaluation of the project undertaken by the Centre for Cultural Diversity and Wellbeing at Victoria University found that participants reported a reduction in alcohol consumption and a change in belief about their ability to create change in their relationship with alcohol. We are currently undertaking further research with Victoria University and VicHealth to measure the impact of the campaign over a longer timeframe. Be a Brother peer mentors have been trained in research ethics and are conducting in depth interviews with ‘brothers’ to further investigate the outcomes of the project.

The Be a Brother project successfully demonstrates that this community holds critical knowledge that can mobilise local action and promote healing. I have no doubt that the young African men involved will make positive and significant contributions to Australia if they are given the chance.
THE AFRICAN AUSTRALIAN WOMAN:
RESILIENT, PERSISTENT, ACCOMPLISHED

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Dr Chi Watts is a Public Health expert and an academic at Victoria University, Melbourne Australia. Her diverse range of skills and interests include International Health, Gender, Advocacy, Health Policy, Research, Chronic Disease Prevention & Management, Curriculum Development and Strategic thinking. Dr Chi Watts is currently the Deputy Chair for Women’s Health West, Board of Directors, a Commissioner with the Victorian Multicultural Commission and a Board Director at AMES Australia Board of Directors. Improving sexual health needs for women, advocating for and creating better opportunities for disadvantaged persons and increasing opportunities amongst disadvantaged women remain areas of interest of Mimmie’s. Dr Chi Watts is the Convener of the African Diaspora Women Summit.

African Australian women and girls constitute over half of the over 380,000 African Australians and with many of the recently arrived leading many of the households. The reasons for this include solo migration; husbands returning to their home countries for better employment opportunities; being unable to find suitable partners; and having left abusive relationships. From anecdotal evidence, the stigma associated with family violence means it goes unreported or under reported. Our women fear ostracism and isolation from their networks and families, thus many stay. This short piece highlights the lived experiences of African Australian women, covering such factors as the opportunities and challenges provided to them by education, and the role of customary networks that many of these women lack in Australia. African woman do come in many shades, shapes and sizes. Of the intersections that map out their lives—being migrants, being women, speaking with an accent, being well educated or not, being refugees or being skilled migrants—perhaps the most important is the physical marker of skin colour.
For this article, I will draw on previous research and work in this area and scientific publications that are available online, accessible with a simple google search of my name. I also draw on my own ‘insider-outsider’ status: ‘outsider’ through my training in science, health and social sciences that enables me to objectively analyse relevant data; ‘insider’ because I’m proud of the African culture that nurtured me. I have direct experience and understanding of the cultural factors that underlie the raw data. I’m a skilled migrant, with a PhD, with a white husband with a background in medicine. And of course, I don’t claim comprehensive knowledge about all African cultures and women’s experiences. This short article will use two composite women, Nadia and Zahra, to illustrate several pertinent factors.

Nadia migrated to Australia on a spouse visa. Her husband, who was her sponsor and a student at the time, studied, while Nadia had to work hard to pay his fees, pay their bills and get them settled in an unfamiliar environment. Meanwhile, he met another woman at university and they ‘fell in love’, six months before he was due to graduate with an MBA and hopefully get that dream job they had both sacrificed for. Nadia felt betrayed and alone, but knew that nothing was worse than returning home to her patriarchal family who would never understand why she could not accept her cheating husband back. This was not the first incident of unfaithfulness, and Nadia was certain it would not be the last either. Regardless, she forgave him and twelve months later he confessed to her, ‘I did it again’. Her husband referred to himself as a traditional man, ‘I am a polygamist by nature and culture’. With such a history and a pattern, Nadia had to decide.

So she finally left her husband, taking their three young children: two year old twins, and a two months old baby. As traumatised as she felt, Nadia had to pick herself up, turn her life around, and decide which path to take. She had to stop feeling sorry for herself, to build a future for her children. Her ex-husband could not support her financially, as he struggled to find employment that matched his qualification, and eventually decided to return to his country of origin, where he soon remarried and started another family. He took a third wife not long after.

Nadia had completed an engineering degree prior to migrating to Australia and, with the publicity about the shortage of girls in science, thought it would be easier to gain employment in science. But a year later she had been turned down for several jobs in science and had used up all her savings. Fortunately, Nadia had decided to take a course in aged care, a pragmatic choice rather than a desired one. After three years working in aged care, Nadia decided to pursue a professional career in industrial law. She enrolled into a postgraduate course and graduated two years later. Her children, now in middle school, were all thriving.

Nadia could now chase a career in engineering, science, law, or a combination of the three. She started the ‘process of job application’—a process that has become a familiar story for many qualified African women, a story that tells only of frustration in trying to find secure employment in your field of expertise, irrespective of capabilities and qualifications.

Six months went by, then twelve months and soon it was years; Nadia was still an over-qualified patient care assistant. The companies’ responses to her job application followed an identical theme: ‘Thank you for the application. Your application was of high calibre but we are sorry that on this occasion, there were other more “qualified” candidates. We wish you well in your job search’. Other times Nadia received no responses.

Discouraged and disheartened, Nadia gave up trying to find a job in her professional area. But by chance, while on her three-hour train journey home from work, she met Janet. They found they lived only a few blocks apart, and the conversation turned to her children. This stranger invited Nadia to her local social group where Nadia met an employer who was looking for someone with exactly Nadia’s combination of skills. Nadia quickly submitted her application, got the job and thrived, and today is a senior executive.
If you didn’t know her story, you’d never imagine how she arrived at her current personal and professional success. Nadia herself never ceases to wonder how her life would be without that chance meeting on the train, and Janet’s kindness that opened a ‘new network’ for her. Like Nadia, many other African women miss opportunities for the lack of a professional network.

Let’s turn to Zahra, who arrived in Australia as a refugee with no English after fleeing war and living a protracted life in refugee camps across four countries. Though ‘illiterate’ in English on arrival in Australia, Zahra was fluent in five other languages, including French and Arabic, and was a respected leader among her people. After studying English for three years, she enrolled in a certificate course, later a diploma and finally a teaching degree. Today Zahra is a language teacher in the primary school near her home, concurrently built a small business and mentors young people from her community. Zahra misses her extended family overseas, and the interdependent communal networks that shaped her and gave her resilience. Though she regrets her children will never experience this, she is happy that her children will never have to experience her somewhat nomadic ‘life-on-the-run’.

Nadia and Zahra illustrate women with different stories, backgrounds and journeys. But it’s their journeys and hardships that make them resilient; they eventually thrive, despite the odds. Their resilience and persistence are not unique for African women, but their stories, their successes and their voices shouldn’t be lost.

The contribution of African women to Australia is significant in proportion to their number, but little is known about them, what energises them, what their aspirations are and how they could contribute to their new home. Conversely, the West’s tendency to view Africa as a single country and culture can overlook the vitality and diversity of African communities. Sadly, it can be difficult to transmit the positive aspects of African culture to their children, who can get caught between the two cultures, at heavy cost.

Within this context, the idea rose of a summit focusing on hearing, mentoring, celebrating and empowering African women of the Australian Diaspora. The summit was called ‘The Inaugural African Diaspora Women Summit’ and was held on June 26 and 27 at Victoria University Convention Centre in Melbourne CBD. It was led by African women, for African women, with the support of fellow women (and men) regardless of ancestry. Summit sessions addressed health issues, economic independence and leadership. The voices of Zahra and Nadia, professionals and leaders from African communities and those who work with African women informed the summit, and will again inform policy. For more information on the summit, visit the website: www.africandiasporawomensummit.org.au

Selected media appearance and profile links:
The Interconnected Layers of Dr Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi Watts http://www.kwesu.com/plugs/interconnectedlayers
Trailer- Inaugural African Diaspora women Summit: https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Snoujly3DcU&ti=6s
Oneness Entertainment https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbqQWRxM2k
VU Profile link: https://www.vu.edu.au/contact-us/mimmie-claudine-ngum-chi-watts
We are a group of young African-Australian women using community arts as a force for social change. Our group aims to empower, motivate and educate young women to achieve self-confidence and embrace their individuality. Previously the group tackled different topics of importance in the South Sudanese community including sexual health, respectful relationships and misrepresentation of African young people in the media. Through our work we hope to inspire other young people to create social change by amplifying their voices. We are currently developing a series of short poetic documentary pieces entitled ‘Mind Body Soul.’

New Change is an initiative by young African women aged 18 to 22 of primarily South Sudanese background in Melbourne’s western suburbs. Our aim is to empower, motivate and educate young women to develop self-confidence, leadership and advocacy skills. We use a combination of spoken word, poetry, dance and film to explore topics and issues that are relevant to our lives. We bring to our work our knowledge from our tertiary studies, including youth work, community development, psychology, health sciences and law. Through this work we aim to build public awareness of the stories of young women in the South Sudanese community in Melbourne and beyond. These stories reflect many stages of our settlement journeys in Australia and show how, as young people, we are striving to make a difference and push for social change. With the support of Brimbank Council our group has previously tackled topics of importance, including sexual health and respectful relationships.

At the start of 2016, following an incident at the Moomba Festival, where violent brawls involving South Sudanese youth erupted at the three-day festival, we noticed that the media was reporting
issues in a way that negatively impacted on our lives and our community. One member said that after the Moomba event she was walking with her friends and a stranger slowed down in their car and told her she was part of the so-called APEX gang and to go back to where she came from. The actions of a small percentage of young men in our community and the unfair reporting on this was having a negative impact on our everyday lives and was creating negative stereotypes about African young people.

In response to the negative news coverage about our community, we sought to challenge misrepresentation in the media. With the support of Brimbank Youth Services we used the arts-for-social-change framework to develop a project entitled ‘Breaking News’—a film clip that features spoken word, poetry and dance. In our video we speak about ‘a battle for truth’ and using our ‘words’ or voices to fight back against negative stereotyping of young African Australians.

Since our video has gone public we have taken our message to the broader public in a number of ways. For example this year we gave evidence at the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Migrant Settlement Outcomes with the hopes of highlighting important issues in relation to education. We have also featured on several local radio and television programs to raise awareness about misrepresentation and shed light onto other issues within our community. Another really important part of the work that we are developing is education and outreach. Since the film clip launched we have spoken at several primary and secondary schools, running workshops about our experiences and giving advice about how to make a change. We have been really excited by the positive feedback about our work, especially this past month when we were named as finalists in the Footscray Community Arts Prize.

Currently we have been developing a number of poetic documentaries on topics related to ‘Mind, Body and Soul’, with the aim to embrace our individuality and facilitate empowerment for young African women. One of our current mini documentary projects is about the diversity of African hair and the ways in which it forms part of our identity and culture. We really hope to challenge societal beauty standards and encourage young women to embrace who they are. Similarly we are also working on a project about mental health, with the hopes of increasing awareness about this issue.

In the second half of 2017, building on our longstanding partnership with Brimbank Council, we will take up a creative residency at the newly redeveloped St Albans Community Centre. This will allow us to connect with other young people who are using creative arts to make a difference.

Link to ‘Breaking News’ film clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcEolucI3tg
The economic empowerment of women has had a huge positive impact on the world. The benefits are both personal and public—for the community at large. Economic empowerment affects every element of a woman’s life and is therefore something vital for all of us to work on. This includes governments, civil society, organisations, individual women and men working together to increase women’s economic empowerment. According the McKinsey Global Institute, increasing women’s economic empowerment as part of gender equality measures not only affects individual women and their families but the economic growth and prosperity of the whole world.

It is easy to throw around the term economic empowerment but what does it mean? I am passionate about women being economically empowered but what do I mean by this exactly? According to the OECD ‘economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from, growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Economic empowerment increases women’s access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information.’

Empowered women have choices to live their lives their way. An example is a woman who is in a domestic violence situation is more likely to stay in an abusive situation when she is not able to financially care for herself and her children. Having financial resources gives women in these situations the freedom to leave unhealthy traumatic situations for themselves and their children.

Some research projects have noticed that when a woman with children earns more money, her children’s education and health prospects also improve. When a woman has enough money, she...
finds a way to give back to her community whether in money or in expertise. Economically empowered African Australian women means increased social cohesion, wellbeing, education and health outcomes for the family and the community. Why is that? Because when a woman is economically empowered it increases her resources to take care of her family and community, it also gives her a voice to influence her family and community. Diversity of decision makers in any community increases the wellbeing and progress of that community.

There are many obstacles women face when it comes to economic empowerment which need to be worked on. There is ingrained discrimination and cultural norms that have meant men are known as the controllers of the financial and economic aspects of families and society. This view has started shifting in the past century but it is still very much ingrained in the opportunities available for women to control their own economic destinies. Another major problem for women all over the world, including Australia, is the less than equitable distribution of wealth between men and women. There is a gender pay gap in every country in the world caused by a complex mixture of type of jobs women undertake that are usually underpaid and the amount of unpaid work women undertake. Unpaid labour is a major factor that affects women’s financial empowerment as caring and household duties are not paid for and appreciated as part of the economy. This disadvantages most women who undertake the majority of this work. These are challenges that we must work on to increase women’s economic empowerment.

It is a challenge for women in general to be financially independent but African Australian women as migrant women have extra factors that hold them back. It is very tough to come into a new country, learn how the economic system works and gain the training and knowledge required to truly thrive financially.

What challenges do African Australian women face?

- Systemic racism in the job market, in business funding decisions and in the education sphere plays a part in limiting their opportunities.
- Cultural factors where they are expected to do most of the unpaid care work also limit their financial independence.
- Lack of relevant vocational training is another impediment for many women in this group.
- Lack of networks in Australia also plays a huge role. Having a wide diverse range of networks makes financial independence easier. This is something that affects migrant women a lot more than mainstream populations who have access to family and deep connections over generations.

Government, civil organisations and individuals need to focus on how they can help African Australian women lower and eliminate the above challenges to open up their financial opportunities.

Below are three programs that are doing work around the economic empowerment of African Australian women and other migrant women.

The first example is the social enterprise SisterWorks which supports women who are migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, many of who are African Australian women, to start and run their own micro businesses. The entrepreneurs are sisters who are working toward reducing their dependence on welfare and becoming economically independent by developing their own enterprises.

Another program that is working on increasing the empowerment of women, including African Australian women, is Fitted for Work. Fitted for Work help women experiencing adversity break through barriers to get and keep work by offering employment services which help women build their skills and develop their confidence to achieve meaningful work.

Herconomics, a social enterprise that I founded, brings women together, the majority of who are African Australian women, to talk and learn about money, online and face to face. There is a need for a cultural revolution around African Australian women to openly discuss money and to empower each other around money. When you openly talk about a subject, knowledge grows and people act.

African Australian women have a much to offer the Australian community. Their economic empowerment is a huge positive for the whole community. There is a lot of work to be done to get more women economically empowered but it is possible if everyone gets on board and works towards it.
SBS Radio is the world’s most linguistically diverse broadcaster, bringing 70 language programs to the nearly five million Australians who speak a language other than English at home. Broadcasting over four radio stations (SBS Radio 1, 2, 3, 4) and SBS Arabic24, with three dedicated music stations—SBS Chill, SBS PopDesi and SBS PopAsia, and a growing range of digital services, SBS Radio offers a distinctive service that celebrates Australia’s multicultural diversity. It also helps new migrants to understand Australian values and participate in Australian life—it contributes to social inclusion.

SBS Radio has strong connections with Australia’s multicultural audiences, including the diverse African communities and languages (Amharic, Dinka, Swahili, Somali and Tigrinya audiences). SBS Radio’s broadcasters reflect on some of these community experiences below.

Martin Kwakwa, SBS African Radio

‘I have been working with SBS Radio for about 23 years; the community relies so much on our program to hear or read great, positive stories about their community, how some members are making progress in several areas of Australian life, and also for updates on issues of migration and settlement.’

David Chiengkou, SBS Dinka Radio

‘In my experience of presenting the Dinka program, I’ll never forget a Melbourne listener who left us such a touching message. Despite living in Australia, she had to rely on her children to inform her of what was being said on TV due to the language barrier. But since the introduction of SBS Dinka’s Radio program, she now feels a part of Australian life and enjoys listening to both international and local news in her own language.’
Gode Migerano, SBS Swahili Radio

‘Various communities share their experiences through forums and other events via SBS Radio, which is a great avenue. Providing such a platform has always been beneficial for fellow community members in other states.’

Beyene Weldegiorgis, SBS Tigrinya Radio

‘Many African communities feel that SBS is a bridge between them and the Australian life. For this reason, whenever there are issues or events happening in the communities, I am always invited. I spend most of my weekends attending different functions, festivals and meetings related to the community. This is not because I am special, but because SBS connected me with the communities.’

Hassan Jama, SBS Somali Radio

‘SBS Radio is like a bridge between the community and wider Australia and Australian life, especially for those who can’t speak the language—for these communities we are a door to Australian news.’

Kassahun Negewo, SBS Amharic Radio

‘Our listeners highly appreciate the wide coverage of community events, African news and current affairs that is shared on the program.’

Gode Migerano, SBS Swahili Radio

‘Various communities share their experiences through forums and other events via SBS Radio, which is a great avenue. Providing such a platform has always been beneficial for fellow community members in other states.’
Celebrate African Australia ACT is an annual event that recognises Africans living in Canberra and their impact on society. The awards started three years ago by Mr Isaiah Okorie, a lawyer by profession who took it upon himself to make sure that Africans living in the ACT are recognised for their immeasurable contributions. He handed over last year to Mr Charles Koker, a community leader from Sierra Leone who has been championing the Africa cause in the ACT.

In 2016, 10 of September was a day of honour for the recipients, their friends and family as they joined hands together with their fellow Africans from all across the globe. He has been a volunteer radio presenter with one way FM, a Christian radio station with his program ‘Inspirational Time With KOB’ for the past two and a half years. Kofi is a true and unique representative of the African Continent in Australia.

African poet, story teller, playwright, novelist, academic, motivational speaker and Director of the National Multicultural Festival, Dr Kabu Okai-Davies was the guest speaker for the event where he received the ‘professional excellence’ award. In his keynote speech, he emphasised the need for Africans to unite and become vocal making an impact in our society by taking advantage of the opportunities Australia presents us: ‘Division is killing our development. Africa can’t develop divided’.

Kofi, as he is commonly known has been greatly involved in promoting the interests of Africans not just in the ACT, but Australia wide. In particular, Kofi is a student advocate who has worked tirelessly to promote African students’ interests in Australia at the state, territory and Commonwealth level. Kofi has also served locally as an ACT student Ambassador where he was engaged with the ACT Government to promote Australia and the ACT as a desired student destination for students from across the globe. He has been a volunteer radio presenter with one way FM, a Christian radio station with his program ‘Inspirational Time With KOB’ for the past two and a half years. Kofi is a true and unique representative of the African Continent in Australia.
He further urged our leaders to make the education of women paramount: ‘illiteracy can only be eradicated in Africa when the mothers are educated, because mothers are the first contact for every child’.

He encouraged the youth to take advantage of the opportunities life gives and to make good use of them by studying to make an impact in Africa by reading and leading: ‘read books like your life depends on it. It will sharpen your mind and make you conquer the world. Let your mind become like a magnet and intensify its power through reading.’

Dr Kabu was diagnosed with cancer not long after the awards and was called home to be with the Lord on the 17th of February, 2017, the day Canberra’s National Multicultural Festival started; a festival that was indeed very dear to his heart. He was a father of multiculturalism, stood for African unity and literacy, a role model to the community and stood for the values of community. He is survived by his beautiful Canberra family: wife Pauline, daughter Sika and son Elom.

Other award recipients on the day were: Community Ambassador award for Atem Dhiew Garang; Australian Ambassador Award for Kofi Osei Bonsu; African Australian Business Award to Juliet Graham; Friend of Africa Award to John Gunn; Volunteer of the year to Isaiah Okore; Zambezi Sounds won the Afrocentric Entertainer of the year Award, Community Initiative Award went to Tendayi Ganga and the Young Community Leader Award went to Kudum Akuak Kudum.

This year the awards will be held at the Albert Hall on September 30. Coordinator for the awards Pastor Charles Koker said: ‘This year’s celebration is unique in the sense that it is going to address the very important social issue of domestic violence—an ACT Government target initiative that is also affecting the African community’. A soccer tournament will be organised to put the focus on the issue of domestic violence, in particular violence against women—‘violence that will no longer be tolerated: we cannot continue to lose our homes, lose our children or lose our lives’. Charles Koker said he wants men to embrace this and hopes that together we can help eradicate the scourge of domestic violence in the African community.

The awards ceremony is a very important date in the calendar of the African community each year. It brings together people from all walks of life to reward the good work done for the community by the awardees. It seeks to celebrate, appreciate and showcase the contributions of African Australians in the ACT. The awardees become a beacon of hope for the youth and an inspiration to all.
On 24 May, 2017 Africa Day was celebrated in Canberra. Ghana’s first president Dr Kwame Nkrumah, a pan-Africanist and one of the greatest African leaders said in his independence speech on the 6th of March 1957 that the independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked to the total liberation of the entire African continent. He spearheaded a movement for African unity and on the 25th of May 1963, in the capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, the Organisation of African Unity was formed with the sole aim of uniting the continent and bringing freedom to African countries that were still under colonial rule, defending their sovereignty, raising living standards, ensuring all enjoyed human rights and restoring the dignity of the African people.

54 years after the OAU was formed, Africa Day was celebrated in Canberra with a colourful display of African culture, dance, music and food at the Albert Hall. Governor-General of Australia Sir Peter Cosgrove was the guest of honour together with his wife, Lady Cosgrove. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and Shadow Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong were also present. This year the theme for the celebration was ‘Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth’.

In his speech Sir Peter said we celebrate Africa and give thanks for Africa Unity and cohesion: ‘we rejoice in all that it means to be part of one of the world’s greatest continents. We celebrate Africa’s greatest asset, its people. It is the enormous strength and resilience that drives Africans’ fortune.’

He paid tribute to the over 430,000 Africans living in Australia for their contributions. He praised the efforts of Deng Adut who went from being a child soldier to become NSW Australian of the year as well as the first African Senator Lucy Gichuhi.

The Hon Julie Bishop MP said it was a delight for her to celebrate Africa Day given the diversity, the dynamism, strategic location and economic potential of Africa. What happens in Africa matters to Australia and to the rest of the world: ‘the Australian Government is determined to deepen, broaden and diversify our engagement with the countries of Africa politically, economically, government to government, business to business and people to people.’

Senator the Hon Penny Wong praised the contribution of Africans living in Australia and urged for continuous collaboration between Africa and Australia: ‘we are living in times of great distractions and there is a continued need for cooperation between Africa and Australia. We need greater international efforts to alleviate poverty and stimulate economic developments in Africa’. ‘The nations of the great continent of Africa understand the impacts of climate change and the potential impact on all people’s lives is shocking. Our two extraordinary continents face great risk and as a result we need to work together to tackle climate change as a matter of great urgency’ she added.
Since I arrived in Australia in 2002, community engagement has always been part of my work. As a former refugee myself, I got the opportunity to start working with newly arrived Karen refugees from Burma in 2006. I have always wanted to bring about changes and put refugees’ interests first. This has allowed me to realise my work goals and to fulfil my passion of helping people in need, the refugees!

I am the New and Emerging Communities Liaison Officer (NECLO) with Victoria Police in Flemington where we have launched a new project that connects newly arrived African communities with Victoria Police through grassroots, low cost initiative. The project has been instrumental in breaking down the barriers that exist between African communities and Victoria Police and in fostering better relationships and community harmony. In this article I also introduce a few other projects that have connected grassroots communities with the Police.
After joining the Victoria Police as a NECLO, I established the Inner North West Blue Light (INWBL) Inc., a not-for-profit community organisation in 2013. The following year, after broad local consultation, the Victoria Police and Horn of African Communities Food and Culture Project (Cultural Food Project) proposal was developed. Some of the key considerations in developing this project involved an immediate history of distrust of the police by members of the communities of Flemington and neighbouring areas, and the absence of a consolidated contact point for the variety of ethnic communities in the area.

The Cultural Food Project enables local communities to cook traditional food in their homes and then bring the food to share at Flemington Police Station along with 20 to 25 community members. The aim is to increase cross-cultural dialogue and develop local community members’ understanding of the police and their role. At the police station, up to 20 to 30 police officials, including senior ranks and general duty police members, join the lunch.

At each Cultural Food Project every six to eight weeks, one ethnic group community living in public housing estates such as Flemington, Ascot Vale, North Melbourne, and Kensington cook their traditional food. The cooking is done by members of the community and the INWBL covers the cost of the materials.

At the lunch, the group leader bringing the food gives a talk about their food, culture, and experience to create better understanding and develop a relationship with police members. This provides a more informal setting for police members to mix with the community rather than meeting them on police duty. Informal meetings with the uniform police and the sharing of different traditional food not only develops personal connections between two groups, breaks the isolation and promotes cohesive communities, it also sends strong messages of a sense of belonging, personal connection, and trust. People from these communities have rarely had the opportunity to interact with police members. In particular, females and young people avoid the police assuming police culture in Australia is no different from police culture in their home country.

Providing a platform through food has not only promoted the cultural awareness within police ranks, it has also educated the police about various ethnic groups and languages within African communities and reduced the myths that both side held about each other.

The Cultural Food Project has developed to other communities and is now covering four City Councils: Moonee Valley, Hume, Melbourne, and Moreland and nine police stations. It involves Indian, Bhutanese, Lebanese, Turkish, Nepalese, Pakistani communities and other newly arrived communities.

Another successful engagement and contribution made by the local African communities is the Fun in the Aussie Sun Festival, held in 2013 and in 2014, organised by INWBL through funding provided by the Victorian Government. These festivals involved diverse African communities from the planning stage until the festival day. They brought together recently arrived communities living in North Melbourne, Kensington, Carlton, Flemington, Ascot Vale, and others from the wider Melbourne. The festivals have provided opportunities for local communities to engage with others as most attendees were mums and dads from the housing estates who had rarely been out of their local area. African youth and community representatives were employed.
on a part-time basis, volunteers were paid fuel costs, dancers were paid for performances, and
the festival planning committee included African community representatives who were paid meeting
fees. This has increased the trust with police and provided the communities with ownership in decision making processes. Leading up to the festival, the volunteers were given training in grant writing skills, event management, and volunteer coordination developing their management and leadership skills. The festivals brought together over 50 presidents and head of ethnic community organisations each year as well as over 40 police officials. Ministers, Members of Parliament, and service provider agencies also attended.

A third initiative is the Ramadan Iftar dinner hosted by INWBL and Victoria Police for communities in the vicinity of housing estates in North Melbourne. Local communities and Muslim faith leaders are invited to celebrate Ramadan. The last dinner was attended by over 40 police officials. Members attending this dinner have normally no networking opportunities, exposure to, or opportunities to attend big events hosted across Melbourne.

The above mentioned initiatives are celebrated with communities and Victoria Police annually in the Cultural Diversity Week Celebration (CDWC) on Harmony Day in March as well as at an Australia Day ‘THANK YOU BBQ’ in January. At the BBQ, Victoria Police invite all community members to the police station to cook together, talk about belonging and to celebrate Australia Day. At the CDWC, Victoria Police recognises and honours community groups who have cooked food throughout the year by presenting awards to volunteers and allowing several community members to share their experience of working with the police. Chief Commissioners, other senior police, MPs, and philanthropists like Peter Scanlon, Chair, the Scanlon Foundation, Chair, Refuge of Hope, attend the celebration and reaffirm how multiculturalism always has served Australia well.

Though challenges still remain in increasing knowledge about African communities and a complete understanding of the role of the police, initial results from the abovementioned projects have demonstrated a significant change in the perceptions of the police by African communities. Victoria Police and African communities have, to a great extent, accepted and created a better understanding of each other. This has resulted in making our community safer through increased trust, and understanding of different cultures, traditions, languages, and faiths. It has also increased the knowledge about the roles of the police in the communities.
Jennifer Hippisley has a background of employment and leadership in secondary teaching, consultancy and education administration, as well as valuable experience in community service. Her diverse career has been centred on education and ensuring success for all young people, whether in the classroom, leadership positions or working with business and industry. She is passionate about supporting young people to be the best they can be.

Future Voices Incorporated is a not for profit charity established in 2016, working with the diverse communities in Shepparton, Victoria to meet an identified need voiced by the newly arrived African refugee community. Research tells us that most extensive types of volunteer work conducted by refugees and humanitarian entrants involve helping with the settlement of their own communities. Future Voices has grown from this grassroots concept and from the community itself, with African community leaders, in developing the program concept. Critical to success has been the building of trust, listening to the real needs of the communities and helping them to make their ideas grow.

Future Voices commit to coaching members of the migrant and refugee community in the planning and delivery of projects, providing employment opportunities and improved employability skills in line with the social inclusion goals of learn, work, engage and ‘have a voice’.

‘I worry about my children a lot. They are caught between two cultures, now. I can see my son as a leader but I ask myself where he will go to build, learn and practice leadership skills, and I worry a lot… ‘Building la Nouvelle Generation Program’ will help my son to develop leadership skills, and help him create a connection within the community. He will learn life lessons that will help him manage both his past and also the future.’

African refugee parent

Future Voices’ purpose is to advance education by providing life-skills training to young migrants and humanitarian refugees that experience multiple barriers so that they can succeed in education, reach their full potential and contribute to the community. We develop better futures for refugee and migrant young people aged 15–25 years through:

- building hope and strong aspirations
- developing understanding of career paths and employment opportunities
Building a New Generation of Leaders program instils in disadvantaged youth a sense of vision and purpose, and creates opportunities that otherwise would never exist. To improve the chances of successful resettlement and community integration, successive governments have put in place services and structures to assist migrant individuals and families with settlement. Such programs have included language schools, pathways to schools and higher education institutions, social support services following resettlement and many more. But there is a strongly felt need for mentorship and leadership programs to assist youth who had arrived in Australia as minors, either on their own or with ‘family’ or significant other, and who had missed out on the integrative aspects of growing up in the country in which they were now living.

Dr Mimmie Claudine Watts

Future Voices focus on explicitly teaching life and employability skills, strengthening and improving cross cultural understanding and inter country relations. We have a commitment to innovative program design and developing entrepreneurial networks that will be required for regional development, global engagement and future growth of the economy.

Our learning and leadership program is underpinned by an emphasis on cognitive, metacognitive and affective skill development making it an enhanced youth leadership program which is quite unique.

‘Cognitive skills include memory, attention and problem-solving. Metacognitive skills are skills associated with an understanding of how learning occurs. Affective skills are skills that are related to feelings and emotions, such as developing a value system, then internalising and acting on these values. Motivation is considered the most important affective skill.’

‘The teaching and modelling of values are immeasurably important in shaping our young people. Honesty, integrity, resilience, respect, responsibility, understanding, sharing, generosity, helping, serving others, a strong sense of social justice, a joy for life and its opportunities and wonders. We want all the children and families in our
communities to be resilient, happy, well-educated and connected. We want young people connected to old people, cherishing their knowledge and experience. We want young people to be considered and reflective thinkers with a strong moral purpose, clear values and beliefs and a strong sense of commitment to leading a good and useful life. This leads to a creative and dynamic community that values diversity and where everyone has a sense of purpose and belonging, and are able to contribute to the prosperity of the region.’

Jennifer Hippisley CEO Future Voices.

We use a collaborative partnership approach. Our practice is flexible and responsive to practical, social, cultural and religious norms and needs of diverse communities. Our strategies bring together people from new and emerging communities that may be linked by common experiences, such as being survivors of the migration experience or enduring war and traumatic experiences, with the broader community.

The Building a New Generation of Leaders (BNGL) program is a youth leadership project that connects young humanitarian entrants and vulnerable migrants with mentors to close the unemployment gap and improve social cohesion indicators. This is a year-long youth leadership program that consists of: building hopes and dreams, teaching the tools for success, learning from over 70 leaders, accessing networks and connections and linking with mentors. The BNGL program is designed to increase the participants’ chances of success in life. Participation in the program raises cultural awareness within the community for everyone involved, including participants, guests, hosts, and business mentors. The speakers that engage in the program find that their perception of multicultural youth is challenged and changed for the better.

Having a ‘voice’, having a good education, having good support, having mentors will all contribute to developing individuals, enhancing social cohesion, building resilience and fostering the next generation of potential leaders. These leaders will in turn become mentors and positive role models within their own communities and the general community.

‘Australia has changed my life. I have seen how people struggle to live, and struggle to get a job without education. Where I come from, more materials are needed in schools, books and resources that are better than a tiny blackboard constantly wiped clean. I have learnt that kids need to be fit and fed in order to learn. My vision and passion is to help others, and one of the ways has been through the setting up of a Youth Leadership Foundation—Masomo Mbele—School First. This is in early stages, but did include a field study trip in late 2014 to Africa to meet with the most disadvantaged school communities to develop collaborations and partnerships for the future.

Masomo Mbele is about HOPE. It is about the importance of education. The process of developing Masomo Mbele in our community enables young people to show community leadership. The process of developing Masomo Mbele in our community is reason for diverse communities to come together in collective action. The process will develop greater social cohesion, a sense of belonging and greater appreciation of diversity. The process will develop greater appreciation of the value of young people in the community. The process will be an opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way to improve the lives of those living without hope.

This is an opportunity to develop a ‘youth driven story’ across countries and cultures. I see this opportunity, and this challenge, as the second biggest achievement of my life. In my dream, I see poor children who have nothing, being given hope and opportunity as we have been. Our communities here will be richer in the knowledge that they have made this happen.’

Declo Bisimwa, Future Voices Alumni
AFRICAN AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP FORUM (AACLFL)

STEVEN SIBANDA AND DR CHARLES MPHANDE (BASED ON THE AACLFL COMMUNITY ISSUES PAPER SEPTEMBER 2016, WRITTEN AND PRESENTED BY ZIONE WALKER-NTHENDA)

Background

The high visibility of the African Australian communities has contributed to incidents of antisocial and sometimes criminal behaviour being blamed on the failure of all Africans to be productive residents or citizens of this country. This perception is far from the truth and is the reason a dedicated group of volunteer professional African Australian Communities Leaders (AACLFL) have been meeting to share ideas on how best to change the negative narratives by focusing on enhancing programs that would deliver on positive outcomes.

Organic Formation of the AACLFL

A series of breakfast and dinner meetings and workshops became the building blocks for the AACLFL. At these meetings substantial policy issues were discussed including the following:

- Law and Order with the Acting Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police
- Human Rights Issues with the Chair of the Victoria Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
- Multicultural policy directions with the Chairperson of Victorian Multicultural Commission
- Multicultural issues and social cohesion with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Finance
- Focus areas for the African Australian Community with the Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship
- Focus Areas for the African Australian Community with the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship.

The most significant realisation was the importance of collaboratively working together in a strategically coordinated way, thus the birth of the AACLFL.

Stephen Sibanda has a Master of Business and Information Technology and a Master of Agribusiness from Melbourne University. He is the African Australian Community Partnership Project Officer in the Social Investment Branch at the City of Melbourne. He is co-founder of Africa Day Australia Inc. and its founding Chairperson. Stephen is also former Chairperson of Zimbabwe community in Australia as well as founder of the Zimbabwe Community Language School and ex-officio member of the African Australian Communities Leadership Forum (AACLFL), Africa Day Australia Inc. (ADA), Nelson Mandela Day Commemorative Committee (NMDCC), and African Music and Cultural Festival (AMCF).

Dr Charles Mphande is a senior lecturer at the Victoria University in International and Community Development. He has a specialist interest in discourse in development and other settings; network analysis, especially among emerging communities in Australia; knowledge democracy movements and the growing space for social economy and its promise to the Global South. Dr Mphande is an academic editor of the Asian ESP and an active member of the Communication and Partnership team of Engagement Australia.
The AACLF is a:
• strong network of African Community Leadership
• platform for individuals and organisations with diverse African Australian backgrounds, skills and expertise that support one another
• unique coalition that facilitates robust debates within African Australian communities and fosters engagement with decision and policy makers at all levels.

Through a facilitated workshop and many communications over months, a community issues paper with the following vision, mission, and values was developed:

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**Our Vision:** An Australia where African Australians are Australians.

**Our Mission:** A united voice of the African Australian Community.

**Our Values:** Unity, integrity, accountability, respect and success.

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AACLF community issues paper

The most significant workshop was facilitated by lawyer and trained facilitator, Zione Walker-Nthenda. She coordinated and prepared the issues paper drawing on the many community voices: young people, people with low-English literacy, people from diverse faiths, languages, ethnicities, diverse skills and educational backgrounds. The report was drafted in very simple terms for community by community and yet with enough of a policy format for policy makers to find it useful.

The City of Melbourne’s African Australian Community Partnership Project (AACPP) provided significant support as well as the venue for the presentation of the community issues paper to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Finance, Shadow Spokesperson for Multicultural Affairs, Deputy Commissioner of Victoria Police, Victorian Multicultural Council (VMC) Chairperson and Councillors from the City of Melbourne.

The issues paper summarised previous AACLF discussions where challenging areas were identified and prioritised with an action plan to build capacity and enhance a positive narrative of the African Australians in Victoria.

At the Issues Paper Workshop the core focus areas for addressing the challenges in a strategic, collaborative and systematic way included:

1. **Creation of an African Australian Clearing House**

The Clearing House is conceived to be a:
• voluntary repository of African communities’ databases—organisations, communities, expertise, programs/projects—for purposes of collating submissions to sources of funding and advocacy. The databases will be used in collaborative work with other African interest organisations, and individuals, such as African Diaspora networks
• participatory transformational action space for understanding communities and their circumstances through knowledge creation, i.e. data/evidence gathering and reporting for ACTION
• participatory space for benchmarking, monitoring, evaluation of wellbeing among various demographics
• space for communities’ capacity building in social analysis and crafting of strategies for transformation
• space for consultation and advocacy between various government levels
• a space for consultative work with other diaspora initiatives.
2. **Addressing Social Justice Issues by**
   - providing sustainable funding for African Australian community organisations engaged in justice and legal information, awareness and training
   - developing culturally appropriate and targeted programs to inform community about the justice system and improve service delivery
   - developing information programs for professionals in the social justice system to become aware of the cultural context and any barriers impacting community.

3. **Assisting people experiencing additional barriers by**
   - providing sustainable funding for African Australian community organisations already engaged in this work
   - developing early intervention and prevention programs
   - developing resources and programs to inform and create accepting and resilient communities.

4. **Tackling the employment/unemployment issue by**
   - recognising the importance of educational pathways as the determinant of employment/unemployment outcomes
   - partnering with employers, service providers and connecting them with people facing barriers to employment opportunities
   - developing entrepreneurial programs to create alternative pathways to economic opportunities
   - conducting ongoing research on innovative employment and entrepreneurial pathways.

5. **Strengthening families by**
   - recognizing families as the core building blocks for communities and society at large
   - linking certain outlier behaviours to relevant African Australian organisations and relevant family programs and seek specific culturally sensitive scientific interventions
   - engaging service providers and working with communities to adapt the programs to ensure appropriateness of interventions
   - create new, innovative programs to fill program and service delivery gaps.

6. **Engaging youth by**
   - conducting a needs assessment with young people to develop relevant internship and employment programs
   - developing educational programs to re-engage young people with educational challenges, particularly English as a second language courses
   - exploring the feasibility of a cultural centre and developing a platform to recognise young people and harness their talents
   - developing a strategic plan to work with the media to establish a socially responsible and ethical reporting framework on vulnerable young people and minority communities, establish representation frameworks that include African Australians in media roles, build community capacity and ensure normalised representation through the acquisition of African Australian, African and African diaspora content for media broadcast
   - working with service providers to use a rights based approach to deliver services, with training resourced by government and co-developed with community to inform expectations, rights and responsibilities.
7. Seniors
- conduct evidence based research to determine numbers and needs of senior African Australians
- develop culturally relevant programs and resources to inform service providers of their needs.

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

The AACLF agreed that youth issues should take centre stage in understanding and formulating action plans to address the challenges. The community should work with young people to identify the drivers of challenging behaviours, then determine pathways to operationalise the desired change in the short, medium and long-term.

The approach would pre-empt the ‘rough-and-tough’ reaction heavily promoted by some media outlets by demonstrating sophisticated ways of dealing with the issues that are informed by a superior/comprehensive knowledge of the issues.

At the presentation of the AACLF issues paper, a call for collaboration in resourcing a project coordinator whose role it would be to coordinate an action plan to advance the focus areas was made. It was felt that a dedicated resource would not only speed up the process but would be effective in bringing workings groups together. The project coordinator will map out all African organisations, what they are doing and where they are doing it as well as creating baseline information of what strategic projects are on the ground and how these can collaborate to achieve greater scalable outcomes.

1. Response from the Minister of Multicultural Affairs and Finance
The Minister supported the initiatives and particularly mentioned that it would be good to see what African Australians are bringing to the table. The Minister would consider the proposals in the issues paper and get back to the AACLF.

2. Response from the Shadow Multicultural Affairs Spokesperson
The Shadow Multicultural Affairs offered her total support for this initiative. She was impressed that this was a ground up approach to resolving community issues and urged the government to show support.

3. Response from the City of Melbourne (CoM)
The CoM responded that it is already supporting the African Australian Communities through its African Australian Community Partnership Project which has facilitated the AACLF Issues Paper presentation. CoM is running projects that align with some of the focus areas outlined in the issues paper including employment, empowering women and families and the general AA community participation. The CoM would collaborate with the AACLF to advance this grassroots driven initiative.

AACLF call to action for stakeholders and partner organisations
The AACLF is currently seeking partnerships/collaboration to achieve the following:

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

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FECCA is the national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. We provide advocacy, develop policy and promote issues on behalf of our constituency to government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism.

FECCA’s membership comprises state, territory and regional multicultural and ethnic councils. FECCA has an elected executive committee and a professional national secretariat implementing policies and work programs on behalf of its membership and stakeholders.

For more information and to read more about FECCA’s policies and program, please visit our website: www.fecca.org.au. Alternatively, please contact the FECCA office on (02) 6282 5755, or email: admin@fecca.org.au.

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