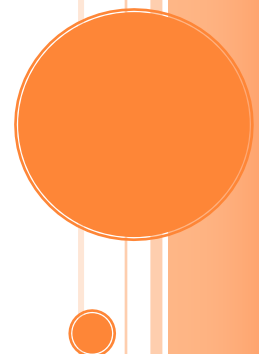# African Australians: A report on human rights and social inclusion issues - Discussion paper

A submission by the Wyndham Humanitarian Network
June 2009

This submission was compiled by Jennie Barrera, Chairperson of the Wyndham Humanitarian Network with the assistance of the Education, Employment, Health & Well Being, Sudanese, Housing and Legal working groups.

AFRICAN AUSTRALIANS: A REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL INCLUSION ISSUES - DISCUSSION PAPER

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1. Employment and training

Access to training

1.1 What barriers do African Australians face in accessing training opportunities?

- Lack of knowledge of employment and training options;
- Lack of individualised assistance in accessing employment and training options, especially in understanding and responding to procedural details;
- Lack of understanding by case managers & employers of the social and cultural backgrounds of clients and their needs; and
- Insufficient resources for individualised case management & mentoring.

1.2 What specific training opportunities would be most helpful to newly-arrived African Australians?

- Channelling them on pathways that recognise their acquired skills and work experience as well as their personal interests;
- Providing mentoring and guidance on careers and trades in high demand in Australia; and
- In the case of trades, providing them, where necessary, with a basic knowledge of English in a vocational setting that speeds up their entry into the workforce.

1.3 How can interpreting and translation services be improved to provide better access and assistance to African Australians in the training and employment sectors?

- Increased funding to train more translators / interpreters;
- Thinking of new ways to engage Job Network Providers and caseworkers to access interpreters;
- Provide interpreters at interviews with caseworkers;
- Translated information regarding employment and training options; and
- Better training for caseworkers and admin staff in the use of interpreters.

Employment and training needs

1.4 Can you give examples of genuine training and employment pathways available to African Australians?

- There are many examples of community enterprises and social enterprises which provide genuine training and employment pathways. 'Lentil as Anything' is a good example of an enterprise offering opportunities for genuine training and employment although not solely for African Australians. In Wyndham, we are currently implementing a project based on the 'Lentil as Anything' philosophy which is attempting to offer real training and employment opportunities for Sudanese and other refugees and humanitarian entrants in the city of Wyndham.

1.5 Please comment on what is meant by 'securing meaningful employment' from your personal and/or professional perspective?

- Any pathway that recognises not only prior learning and experience but also takes into consideration the aspirations of the individual by recognising his or her right to self-determination while at the same time providing the guidance, resources and mentoring to achieve those goals; and
- Not channelling clients, especially those from refugee backgrounds, into the first available menial job but reinforcing their acquired skills.

1.6 What career advice is helpful for newly-arrived African Australians?

- Any advice that assists African Australians to understand the job market, the importance of establishing contacts and networks, accessing services and programs to upgrade existing skills; and
- Any advice that motivates them to be willing and flexible to explore new avenues and pathways to professional advancement.

Employment services

1.7 What barriers do African Australians encounter in using services of employment agencies (including the Job Network)?

- Services are too bureaucratic;

- **There is insufficient case management;**
- **There is a tendency to categorise African clients as "too hard" to be placed in work;**
- **There is inadequate attention to their needs;**
- **There is insufficient accountability in ensuring long-term work through negotiation and mediation with employers;**
- **There are language barriers;**
- **Lack of ICT skills are a barrier; and**
- **Systemic barriers - lack of knowledge of policy and guidelines for accessing Job Network.**

1.8 Do employment agencies provide culturally appropriate services to African Australians? If yes, then how?

- **Some agencies do, particularly when they include the use of interpreters, signs and cultural awareness when asking African Australians to "look" for certain jobs. More generally though there is inadequate provision for the needs of African Australians such as access to interpreters;**
- **There is very little understanding of the refugee experience and lack of experience of staff in general in dealing with diverse cultures due to high staff turnover and cost efficiency demands; and**
- **There is insufficient consultation with prospective employers on exploring options, such as pre-employment training or placement, vocational English classes and transportation.**

Government, employment and training policies

1.9 Have you as an African Australian (or anyone else you know) had your/their overseas qualifications recognised in another developed country similar to Australia?

- **Yes, in New Zealand, Canada and England.**

1.10 Does government employment and training policy and program design meet the needs of African Australians? Please give reasons in your answer.

- **No, there needs to be a greater level of training and education as the AMEP stage is not sufficient. There needs to be a more comprehensive course that runs for two years and this should be exempt from Centrelink and Job Network reporting requirements.**

Employment opportunities

1.11 What are the key challenges faced by African Australians in finding and retaining employment (e.g. recognition of qualifications, English language requirements, etc.)?

- **The main challenges are lack of suitable employment as the jobs they can do are mainly in rural sectors. They do not have the language and work experience to apply for many city jobs.**

1.12 What can be done to increase employment opportunities for African Australians?

- **There should be more production based employment opportunities such as jobs in factories and building sites that require less qualifications and training and these will lead to more skilled employment; and**
- **There should be more opportunities for community and social enterprises and incentives for starting them.**

1.13 What are the health, social and cultural impacts of unemployment and underemployment for African Australians?

- **The health, social and cultural impacts are: depression; lack of self-esteem; reliance on Centrelink payments; not enough money to travel, buy a car or house; lack of confidence; inability to improve their prospects and circumstances.**

1.14 As an African Australian, if you have not had difficulty in securing employment in Australia, please tell us about it and some of the reasons that contributed to your success?

- **No comment**

Discrimination in employment and training

1.15 Can you provide examples of how African Australians are treated differently when seeking employment and/or training?

- **Underemployment of African Australians with skills;**
- **Lack of recognition of overseas qualifications;**
- **Reluctance to case manage;**
- **Discrimination in recruitment; and**
- **Intimidation in the workplace.**

1.16 What is the impact of this discrimination?

- **Social exclusion;**
- **Increased health burden;**
- **Increased vulnerability;**
- **A perception of discrimination;**
- **Over representation of African Australians in low skilled / low paid employment; and**
- **Stereotyping in the media.**

1.17 How can African Australian workers be made aware of and supported to exercise their rights in relation to discrimination in the workplace?

- **Provide regular equal opportunity and human rights training; and**
- **Provide case studies of best practice guidelines.**

The effect of religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability

1.18 Are experiences of employment and training different for African Australians based on religion, age, gender, sexuality or disability? Please provide reasons in your answer.

- **Stereotyping in the media produces negative images of African Australians which can be compounded by religion and gender in particular.**

2. Education

Access to education

2.1 How do African Australians find out about education services available to them?

- **African Australians generally find out about education services and options through caseworkers working with them around settlement services including the IHSS and/or AMEP;**
- **They also find out about education services through Centrelink.**
- **Often they find out via word of mouth from friends and family, especially in relation to community programs held in local community centres and neighbourhood houses.**

2.2 What barriers do African Australians face in accessing education opportunities?

The main barriers are:

- **Age, especially older adolescents (18 -24) who find accessing a senior secondary program difficult;**
- **Disrupted schooling affects African-Australians of all ages but is particularly difficult for adults who have significant language and literacy issues and adolescents whose interrupted schooling impacts on the ability to successfully access the senior school curriculum and or further education opportunities at TAFE and RTOs;**
- **Low language skills are a barrier to further education and training and employment;**
- **Literacy and numeracy skills can be a significant barrier at all levels of education as skill levels are often not age appropriate impacting on access to educational opportunities. Often the desire to access employment quickly is impacted upon by low levels of language, literacy and numeracy;**
- **Generational issues such as parental expectations which may be unrealistic and / or place undue pressure on children;**

- **Dealing with settlement issues such as employment and housing can take precedence;**

- **Discrimination against African-Australian students by institutional systems and sometimes by other students and staff;**

- **Overseas qualifications that are not recognized or that have no direct credit transfer; and**

- **Lack of appropriate choices of courses especially for young adults (20-24) and older adolescents (15-19).**

2.3 What specific education opportunities would be most helpful to newly-arrived African Australians?

The following opportunities would be useful:

- **More funding for intensive English language programs such as AMEP and LLNP especially for those with significantly interrupted schooling and literacy / numeracy issues;**

- **More VCAL programs which target post compulsory age group 20 – 24 years who currently have few options to finish secondary school programs;**

- **Increased bridging courses into vocational training;**

- **More alternative options / alternative education programs especially for older adolescents and young adults who are not able to access mainstream services;**

- **More new arrivals programs;**

- **Increased funding for pathways coordinators / access to pathways planning and guidance;**

- **Programs like "WoW" (Worlds of Work – Foundation for Young Australians) and "UCan2!" (Foundation House);**

- **Expanding age range to secondary schools (currently 18 years plus turned away);**

- **More traineeships and apprenticeships for African-Australians; and**

- **More vocational opportunities and opportunities to combine education with on the job training.**

2.4 How can interpreting and translation services be improved to provide better access and assistance to African Australians in the education sector?

Interpreting and translating services can be improved by:

- Increased funding to train more translators / interpreters;
- Improved knowledge of schools and teachers that interpreting services are free;
- Thinking of new ways to engage schools to access interpreters (e.g.: free call numbers, promotional materials like a sticker to place on phones);
- Encourage parents to use interpreters in dealings with schools by making them more accessible;
- Increased Multicultural Education Aides in schools;
- Provide interpreters at Parent-Teacher interviews;
- Translated information / information nights at transition points. For example, transition from kinder to primary school, transition from Primary to Secondary or from English Language Schools to mainstream school; and
- Better training for teachers and school management and admin staff in the use of interpreters.

Education experiences

2.5 What are the experiences of young African Australians in educational institutions (e.g. schools, universities, TAFE, colleges) in Australia?

In general the experiences are:

- Difficult;
- Challenging;
- Offer little support;
- Isolating;
- Students are highly vulnerable;
- Schools and large organisations like universities often do not cater for the individual;
- Pressure to balance work and family responsibilities; and

- **A safety net to identify students at risk should be developed.**

2.6 As a parent do you think that schools (public and private) have been helpful and supportive to your children and offered a good education and opportunities to learn?

- **N/A**

2.7 As a parent are you actively involved in the school that your children attend and if yes, how did this happen and what is your involvement?

- **N/A**

2.8 How can young African Australians manage any conflict that may arise between their family responsibilities and education?

- **N/A**

2.9 Are there any issues you are aware of for overseas students (fee-paying or subsidised) from African countries?

- **We are unaware of any opportunities of this happening. However, Sudanese families often choose to send their children to catholic schools but the schools often do not have the ESL and well being resources to support them. Fees can also make them inaccessible to many families.**

Educational needs for African Australian students

2.10 Can you suggest any programs and services that can provide additional support to African Australian students during their education?

The following suggestions can provide additional support:
- **Out of school hours learning support programs;**
- **Multicultural Education Aides (funding and training);**
- **Improved teacher training and support - ESL methodology training should be compulsory for all staff and mandatory for pre service teachers;**

- **Transition funding should be available to support students transitioning from primary to secondary and fro students transitioning from English language schools to mainstream schools;**

- **Interpreter services should be increased;**

- **Financial support for books, uniforms etc (currently a major barrier);**

- **Student wellbeing programs (e.g. kaleidoscope);**

- **"Schools in for Refugees" Program;**

- **Orientation packs for schools;**

- **"Talks in" Program;**

- **More programs /services to provide access to technology like computers in the home; and**

- **DVD about pathways.**

2.11 How can Australian education institutions (e.g. schools, universities, TAFE, colleges) meet and support the specific cultural needs of African Australian students, especially those who arrive as refugees or asylum seekers?

- **Refer to answer provided under 2.10;**

- **Whole school approach to valuing cultural diversity;**

- **Schools should ensure that refugee background students have Individual Learning Plans and are assessed where appropriate against the ESL Continuum (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development DEECD);**

- **The DEECD make it mandatory that all teachers appointed as ESL teachers or coordinators in schools have been trained in this role. Currently many ESL teachers have received no specialised ESL training;**

- **Linking with community/ agencies/ services; and**

- **Better integration of services.**

2.12 What training and support should be put in place to assist educators to better understand complex refugee situations?

- **Programs like "Schools in for Refugees" (Foundation House);**

- **Schools should be encouraged to better engage parents in their child's education;**

- **Further encouragement from the DEECD that school leadership implement a whole school approach to student welfare and well being that is separate from their discipline approach;**
- **More ESL qualified teachers;**
- **Specific training for pathways providers in the complexities of issues and barriers facing refugee students; and**
- **Pre service teacher training should focus on learner profiles of refugee and humanitarian entrants including compulsory placement as part of pre service teaching rounds.**

Discrimination in education

2.13 Can you provide examples of how African Australians are treated differently in the education sector?

- **African Australians can be overlooked, especially if there are no challenging behaviours;**
- **A known case of a girl being placed in PE classes for 3 months because of language difficulties;**
- **Age is an issue. For example, students 18 plus and older adolescents are turned away or discouraged from mainstream education;**
- **African Australians are not given the same opportunities as non African Australians;**
- **African Australians can be transient especially if there are housing issues involved and they move a lot impacting on their education and access to education;**
- **Systemic discrimination – educational organisations often only consider 1 style of learning;**
- **Sometimes students are assessed for (and found to have) intellectual or learning disabilities using culturally inappropriate assessment methods which don't take into account the impact of the refugee experience and the associated trauma on development and learning. The DEECD needs to develop culturally appropriate ways of assessing refugee background students;**
- **Lack of data to inform educational experiences of African Australians;**

- **Racism from other students (and sometimes teachers which can be implicit and explicit);**
- **Teachers not learning names as the name is "too difficult"; and**
- **Students asked to anglicize names.**

2.14 What is the impact of this discrimination?

The following impacts can result:

- **Mental health issues;**
- **Disengagement (dropping out - feelings of giving up);**
- **School refusal related to anxiety;**
- **Long term impact on employment and well being in adulthood as a result of low level educational skills; and**
- **High risk behaviours such as increased violence, drug taking, alcohol, crime.**

The effect of religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability

2.15 Are the education experiences of African Australians different based on religion, age, gender, sexuality or disability? Please provide reasons in your answer.

Yes. Education experiences can be different due to the following:

- **African Australians can be more vulnerable to lack of acceptance from within their own community and can be ostracized;**
- **Girls often have additional family responsibilities and domestic duties to perform;**
- **Boy often have to take a leadership role in the family, particularly if there is no father or other male role model;**
- **A child with a disability may be hidden away because of feelings of shame; and**
- **There can be major learning gaps in terms of use of contraception and STDs.**

Government and education policies

2.16 Do government education policies and program design meet the needs of African Australians? Please give reasons in your answer.

- **No, access to education is difficult and prior educational experiences and lack of appropriate resources impact on access to programs. In the current system, there is not enough time to learn English; and**
- **The current system needs to be able to respond in a flexible way to accommodate the educational needs of refugee background students. This includes funding schools to continue the education of refugee background students beyond 18 years of age.**

3. Health

Health issues for African Australians

3.1 What are the main areas of concern for African Australians in regard to health, well-being and health care:

3.1.1 in their first year after arrival in Australia?

- **Lack of knowledge and understanding about 'western' diseases, eg. skin cancer, diabetes;**
- **General mistrust of GPs;**
- **Lack of general knowledge about health issues and health service providers; and**
- **Lack of understanding of health system – for example who to see / referral processes.**

3.1.2 in the longer term (from the second year of settlement onwards)?

- **As for 3.1.1;**
- **Desire to learn more about self management and prevention;**
- **Not knowing where to go for a particular health problem – for example, terminologies are difficult to understand such as GP, primary care, community health service, government hospital and other health system terminologies; and**
- **It's important to meet the needs of the newly arrived at the first stage of settlement rather than wait for problems to exacerbate.**

3.2 Does the Australian health care system adequately meet the needs of African Australians, especially newly-arrived refugees? Please provide some examples.

- **Yes, in that services are available, but no in terms of getting African Australians to access the services;**
- **Terminologies of different services create confusion. For example, most pre-arrival health experiences have involved going to a hospital where it's a one stop shop for health. The Australian experience is different and to add to the confusion there are**

public and private hospitals. More thought and consideration need to be given to terminologies when marketing/targeting newly arrived people; and

- **Health service staff may provide documents such as consent forms, patient information booklets, health care information brochures and flyers which are not translated. Newly-arrived refugees may not understand or fully understand what they are signing but do so for fear of losing much needed services and/or of appearing to be impolite or rude.**

Examples:

- **Case 1: Reminder letter for appointment at tertiary hospital sent in English. African Australian can't read the letter, doesn't attend the appointment and after 3 non attendances is taken off the waitlist. Need to phone to remind of appointments in patient's language.**

- **Case 2: Many African Australians need to go to tertiary hospitals for follow up such as a TB clinic or infectious diseases clinic. Travel to the tertiary hospital is extremely difficult especially for a large family. For example, parents and 6 children attending the Children's Hospital from outer Melbourne suburbs on public transport. It would be ideal to have outreach clinics in the areas where refugees live.**

3.3 As an African Australian, do you generally find Australian health services good quality and are staff professional and polite?

- **Yes, it's good quality compared to African countries. However, in many cases Australian health service staff do not know the different immigration categories or the level of English of the client they are working with and very few make use of interpreting & translating services;**

- **Workers at the coalface have a lack of understanding of cultural groups and language barriers African Australians may face. Simple things like pronouncing a name correctly can have an impact on a newly arrived person's experience of the health system; and**

- **Cultural understanding/competence is generally low in the health system and training should be provided.**

3.4 Please comment on any gender-specific or youth specific health issues for African Australians.

- **No comment**

3.5 What are the issues for African Australians with disabilities in relation to the Australian health care system?

- **Not enough experience with this area to comment, but anecdotally, people with disabilities is a hidden issue and more resources and support need to be provided in this area.**

Mental health and well-being

3.6 If you used a torture, trauma and rehabilitation service, did it help to meet your needs? Do you have any suggestions for improvement to the service?

3.7 How do the effects of family separation impact upon the mental health and well-being of African Australian families?

3.8 How do you feel your mental health and wellbeing has changed since coming to Australia?

3.9 How can the stigma attached to mental health be addressed in African Australian communities?

3.10 Can you provide best practice examples of how to treat sustained mental health issues for African Australians?

- **Hard to answer these questions separately, but as a whole, mental health is a growing area of need / concern amongst African Australians, especially for those who are into the 3+ years of settlement (as identified by health and settlement service providers);**

- **Mental health issues are often not raised by the communities or individuals themselves, especially amongst youth and older African Australians, who are most likely to have been impacted by torture and trauma;**

- **There is a lack of cultural understanding of mental health and stigmatisation of those with mental health issues within the African Australian communities. There is also reluctance to access mental health services for fear of other members of the community finding out about personal mental health issues; and**

- **People with mental health issues are more likely to access community support services such as a church or mosque, or cultural associations or groups, rather than mental health services if they have a problem. Therefore, more support and consideration is needed to engage with these community based organisations in training them to address mental health issues in African communities, as opposed to only funding or providing more support to health services.**

Access to health services

3.11 What are examples of successful ways to explain the Australian health care system to newly-arrived Africans?

- **No comment**

3.12 Even though African Australians may know how to access certain health services, they do not always utilise all the services that they are offered and entitled to. What can be done to change this?

- **Refer to answer provided under 3.2**
- **More information needs to be given pre-arrival, for example, at camp orientation and on arrival, about the health system and the cost of the health system in Australia. For example, some people are afraid to use ambulance or hospital services because there is a perception that they cannot pay for it;**
- **Services need to actively engage with newly-arrived communities such as having physical representation at refugee health forums & workshops and working with community leaders; and**

- **Most services provide 9-5 office hours. There is a need to provide more flexible drop in services. Many newly arrived African Australians are not aware of and are not used to appointment times. Services need to be flexible when catering to newly arrived refugees.**

3.13 How can interpreting and translation services be improved to provide better access and assistance to African Australians in the health sector?

- **The current phone systems are inadequate and it's difficult to get through the first point of call (e.g. the operator asking to press certain numbers for assistance is hard to understand if you can't speak English);**

- **Health professionals need more training and support to utilise translation & interpreting services as many currently do not use existing services;**

- **Health professionals need to be aware of the serious implications of not utilising professional translators, because many ask individuals to provide their own translators, usually family members. Health professionals need to know about their legal obligations in giving information in the client's language with a trained interpreter. For example, a pharmacist dispensing medication needs to be sure the client has no allergies. A Radiologist needs to ensure a client is not pregnant before commencing imaging;**

- **Health professionals and hospitals need to know the importance of using interpreters, have training and gender specific needs, such as not using male interpreters for women's health clinic appointments;**

- **Clients should be able to refuse using certain interpreters if they are not comfortable with the arrangement, especially if the issue is sensitive. Interstate, confidential phone interpreters can be used as an alternative. Communities can be small and clients may know the interpreter personally; and**

- **Create and provide NAATI-accredited interpreting & translation training courses, especially for new and emerging languages, and support newly-arrived trainees through sponsorships and grants.**

Culture and health

3.14 What are some important issues/facts about being from African backgrounds that would be helpful for Australian health service providers to know?

- They shouldn't make health assumptions / generalisations about African Australians, but rather treat everyone as individuals because people have had different pre-arrival experiences;
- They shouldn't make assumptions / generalisations can cause offence and be treated as an insult by African Australians about where they come from, their religion or cultural background;
- They should know there is a general mistrust of GPs, especially those from cultural backgrounds significantly different to theirs. Information should be provided to African Australians about their rights as patients if they feel they haven't been treated properly for cultural reasons, as well as information about GPs' responsibilities; and
- They should have an understanding of the refugee journey/experience and what people from African backgrounds may have been through, such as trauma and torture.

3.15 What training and support should be put in place to assist health professionals to provide culturally appropriate services to African Australians?

- It should be mandatory for health care professionals to attend cultural awareness training sessions, especially cultural sensitivities relating to gynaecological diseases and certain cancers such as prostate and breast cancers;
- It is important to build trust with clients and health care professionals need to be trained in all areas of cultural awareness; and
- More training / support to encourage health care professionals to use professional translating services rather than rely on individuals to provide their own translators, often their own children.

3.16 What can governments, NGOs, communities and health services change to improve the interaction between an African Australian and the health care system?

- Encourage health care professionals to employ bilingual or community workers;
- Develop low level literacy and culturally appropriate health education materials and use all forms of media, including print and audio to get important health messages across;
- Include African Australians to participate in planning, practising and delivering support materials for African communities;
- Work with African Australians and service providers to collect accurate data relating to African Australian's health needs and access to services, especially smaller African groups;
- Acknowledge the importance of targeted health campaigns for African Australians as opposed to just translating general community health campaigns in different African languages; and
- Be diligent in engaging the use of interpreting and translating services, and ensure the use of professionally trained NAATI-accredited interpreters rather than relying on family members.

3.17 Cross-cultural competence in the health care system is essential to ensure that all patients are treated with dignity and provided with appropriate care. Do you know of any best practice examples in the health sector for African Australians?

- No comment

Discrimination and health

3.18 Can you provide examples of how African Australians are treated differently in the health sector?

- Refer to answers provided in 3.14;
- There have been a number of incidences especially in relation to cultural insensitivity / assumptions about Africans and HIV; and

- **In one government funded agency, non English speaking clients wait longer for the service than English speaking clients due to the availability of interpreter funding. Everyone should be able to access this service equally; it should not be dependent on language.**

3.19 What is the impact of this discrimination?

- **The impact of 'word of mouth' amongst the newly arrived and African Australian communities cannot be underestimated. If an individual has a negative experience in the health sector, not only will the individual not feel confident to access health services again, but the community will soon hear about it, and the entire community will not feel confident about the services.**

The effect of religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability

3.20 Are the experiences of African Australians, in regard to health, different based on religion, age, gender, sexuality or disability? Please provide reasons in your answer.

- **No comment**

Government and health

3.21 What actions can governments take (or what targets can government set) to ensure African Australians: are healthy; can better overcome any physical or mental health issues from their refugee or migration experience; and can thrive upon arrival in Australia?

- **Greater support and emphasis on health promotion initiatives to address issues raised;**
- **Link health sector / services with community development services; and**
- **Provide accurate information.**

4. Housing

Housing needs

4.1 What is the experience of African Australians, especially new arrivals, in regard to housing assistance and support?

- **Overall, there is a lot of frustration in regard to housing assistance and support and the general experience is that there is little support.**

4.2 What are the most significant concerns for African Australians in relation to housing?

- **Systemic racism from landlords and real estate agents towards Sudanese making it difficult to find and access rental properties. For example, African Australians are not always 'saleable' to landlords or not seen as a good business proposition;**
- **Access to secure accommodation, whether it be public or private and to housing with more than 3 bedrooms;**
- **The availability of houses: Currently the wait in Wyndham for families/households is in excess of 10 years and more in the case of larger families;**
- **A misunderstanding of rental contracts and the responsibilities required; and**
- **Large families lead to overcrowding in some households, particularly in the case of those on 202 visas.**

4.3 How common is homelessness (including 'couch surfing', rough sleeping and short-term hostel accommodation) amongst African Australians?

- **Homelessness among the African refugee entrant population is a huge problem. Isolation and lack of services further compounds this. Housing affordability means that more families are pushed out onto the Melbourne fringe where it is increasingly isolated, resource/service poor and lacks infrastructure. Those that would rather stay in the city find themselves 'couch surfing' between accommodation at friends'/family's houses until they are no longer welcome, moving onto boarding**

houses, often placing themselves in risky environments where they become exposed to drugs, alcohol and violence. This is more common for young Sudanese.

- Those on 202 visas often experience overcrowding, leading to pressure on the household and sometimes family breakdown. This can eventuate in homelessness.

4.4 Searching for housing can put significant stress on families. What support is required to minimise the stress on African families?

- More funding for housing workers, particularly those that are culturally competent/sensitive and understand the needs of the African community;
- Wider community volunteerism to help with the search and application for private housing;
- Include Housing as part of settlement services;
- Better information on rental contracts and mortgage scams; and
- Programs to educate real estate agents on the potential benefits of having African Australian tenants who will stay long term if property is appropriate.

Access to housing

4.5 What barriers do African Australians face in accessing appropriate and affordable long-term housing?

- Lack of availability of housing and inadequate sizes of houses;
- Lack of public housing;
- Affordability and lack of government support for affordable housing;
- Affordable houses are often only available in low socio economic areas. These areas may not be appropriate as they may expose African Australians to racism;
- Long wait lists;
- Lack of or poor rental history;
- Large families; and
- Poor credit ratings.

4.6 In the private rental market, real estate agents and landlords require evidence of prior rental history in Australia. This poses a major block to newly-arrived African families as they cannot compete with 'more desirable' applicants who have such rental history. In what ways can real estate agents and landlords be more inclusive of newly-arrived African families?

- **Education seminars on what is required from a potential tenant;**
- **Evidence of both qualitative and quantitative data that promotes African Australians as good tenants such as case studies or success stories and facts & figures outlining how long they stay in the same property. This would make African Australians more economically attractive; and**
- **Regulate the industry to be inclusive of new and emerging communities.**

4.7 What type of education/training could assist real estate agents, landlords and public housing officers to better service African Australians, in particular, new arrivals?
- **Cross cultural training at MRCs or other agencies who work with the African community; and**
- **Involve real estate agencies and landlords in wider community events that showcase the African community in a positive light.**

4.8 If you have been involved in a housing appeals process, please tell us about your experiences?
- **N/A**

Housing rights and discrimination

4.9 Can you provide examples of discrimination experienced by African Australians in the private rental market and/or in the public housing sector?

- **Landlords issuing notices to vacate without a reason, after they find language barriers to be a problem between real estate agents and tenants on issues of maintenance or rent arrears.**

4.10 What is the impact of this discrimination?

- **Disenchantment with the housing market;**
- **Mistrust of systems;**
- **Racial tensions;**
- **Distrust of the Australian community;**
- **Anger;**
- **Withdrawal from services; and**
- **Depression.**

4.11 Many African Australians are not aware of their rights and responsibilities as tenants. What other important housing-related information do African Australians need to know, and how can this information be provided?

- **Appeals for rent increases with Consumer Affairs and other disputes;**
- **VCAT hearings relating to tenancy issues;**
- **"own your home fast" scams;**
- **mortgage responsibilities;**
- **Repossession;**
- **Defaulting on mortgages;**
- **Realities of owning home such as affordability;**
- **Realities of public housing especially the application process, review, rejection/acceptance on waiting list, length of waiting list (some clients will hear on the grapevine that one lady got a house from public housing, so expectations arise that the same will happen for them);**
- **Education on condition reports and the rights and responsibilities of tenants;**
- **Education on how to use appliances;**
- **Importance of upkeep and maintenance; and**
- **REIV should be obliged to translate books and information on rights and responsibilities into other languages.**

The effect of religion, age, gender, sexuality and Disability

4.12 Are the housing experiences of African Australians different based on religion, age, gender, sexuality or disability? Please provide reasons in your answer.

- **Negative reporting of the African community in the media creates stereotypes and assumptions that are transferred to the housing market;**
- **Single women and widows can be treated differently; and**
- **Young males face discrimination.**

Housing sector support

4.13 How can governments and NGOs better regulate real estate agents and landlords who service African Australians?

- **While some regulation could be beneficial, there is a need to be careful that over regulating doesn't lead to more discrimination;**
- **Appropriate housing services at initial settlement stage to provide appropriate housing including for those on 202 visas;**
- **Promote better understanding of the specific needs of African communities; and**
- **Aim for stronger anti-discrimination policy in the housing sector.**

4.14 A person's housing situation (including the search for housing) can compromise other important needs such as health care, education and employment. How can services be better coordinated to ensure that all vital needs of African Australians are met?

- **Consistent communication between service providers and real estate agencies which open the lines of communication;**
- **Setting up reference groups or working groups to address issues; and**
- **Include housing as part of settlement service processes for at least 1 year post arrival and provide a settlement process booklet which identifies what has been covered in the settlement process.**

5. Legal

Legal and justice needs of African Australians

5.1 Do you have any comments/observations/stories about the experience of African Australians (including African youth) with the legal and justice systems?

- They do not understand the system. There is a deep misunderstanding about the role of legal providers. Expectations are not always aligned with the reality. There is an expectation from the police to act as a mediation body. The Sudanese community in Wyndham applied for an exemption from the Child Protection laws in Victoria.

5.2 What concerns do African Australians have about the Australian legal and justice systems?

- African Australians have a fear of discrimination which follows on from a lack of understanding of the legal system within Australia;
- African Australians are often afraid to report to or approach police. When they do contact police, they don't always get the response they are looking for due to cultural differences and the inability of local police to provide an extensive service. They are also afraid of the court system. More education is required around these systems; and
- Expectations of police and the justice system are completely different. There is a belief that police can take care of legal matters. They often don't understand that there is an external service of solicitors and legal services.

Rights, justice and the law

5.3 As an African Australian, do you feel protected by the Australian legal and justice systems?
- N/A

5.4 What services exist to explain to African Australians what their rights are when they are involved in the legal and justice systems?

- There is an African Legal Centre but it is 35 kms from the local area and is by appointment only;
- Service providers in collaboration with Victoria Police, run information sessions surrounding the legal system but there is no coordinated approach or ongoing service;
- Services are often reactive rather than proactive; and
- There can be poor turnout at information sessions titled for example, "family violence" which scares people. There needs to be more thought to naming or branding information sessions in positive ways such as, 'healthy relationships'.

5.5 Can you provide examples of any incidences where the rights of African Australians were denied in the justice and law enforcement setting?

Case 1: A Sudanese child was assaulted on the way to school. The parents did not feel the police handled the situation well. There was a perception from the Sudanese that the police did not take care of the situation. The Sudanese did not trust that the police were doing all they could to resolve the issue. The Sudanese did not understand that the police have to follow strict process. The feeling that justice wasn't being done, triggered problems in the local area.

Case 2: One house that was in the process of being built was burnt three times in 3 separate fires, only targeted at that particular house.

Case 3: Some residents of Wyndham vale petitioned the local Council about the Sudanese Community taking over the area.

5.6 What factors can contribute to negative interactions between African Australians and law enforcement?

- **Stereotypes of police and of Sudanese communities;**
- **Language barrier is the major factor for negative interactions and a lack of education and understanding from both sides; and**
- **Expectations of police versus the reality of what happens.**

Access to the legal and justice systems

5.7 What barriers do African Australians face in accessing the legal and justice systems?

- **Lack of understanding of what legal services are available;**
- **Affordability – services can be expensive for those in low paid jobs;**
- **Language barriers; and**
- **Transport for large families and those in outer fringes.**

5.8 What information about the legal and justice systems should be provided to African Australians to empower them? And when is the best time to provide such information (e.g. when a person is in the legal system, or at different time)?

- **Information regarding the Australian Legal System on topics such as: healthy relationships; police powers; contract law; and 'your rights' should all be provided. The best time to provide this is on arrival to avoid African Australians having to struggle through the system once they are already involved in it. Better to be proactive than reactive; and**
- **Pre embarkation information could be improved.**

5.9 Following on from question 5.8 above – how, or through what mechanism/s, can information about the legal and justice systems be best provided to African Australians?

- **Practical information sessions seem to work best with hands on experience, role plays and excursions - actively involving participants rather than lecturing.**

5.10 What can be done to decrease the level of non-reporting of crime by African Australians?

- **Better information provided to the community;**
- **Better rapport developed with local police – 'breaking down the barriers' programs; and**
- **Better understanding of the role of police in Australia is needed so that the African Australian community has realistic expectations.**

Combating family violence

5.11 What are effective strategies that can be used by governments, NGOs or service providers to combat family violence issues for African Australians?

- **Wyndham service providers are currently struggling to implement effective strategies around family violence due to a poor turnout and lack of transportation;**
- **There should be more funded programs around parenting and healthy relationships; and**
- **Funding needs to be provided for 'train the trainer' type programs for community members to be trained to work within their community.**

5.12 How can governments, NGOs and service providers better coordinate family violence services for African Australians?

- We have a poor turnout at sessions provided in Wyndham currently. Participation from both parties is required to be able to form effective strategies.

Discrimination in the legal and justice systems

5.13 Can you provide examples of how African Australians, particularly young people, are treated differently by the legal and justice systems?

- Young Africans are often stereotyped. For example, young Africans who congregate are often perceived to be 'gangs';
- There is a general feeling of mistrust amongst young Sudanese who feel they are treated differently by police. This mistrust can lead to failure to integrate, disengagement and reluctance to access the systems. If they don't trust it, they won't use it. This can lead to taking matters into their own hands, reinforcing the stereotype; and
- There is general feeling amongst police that young Africans don't have respect for them.

5.14 What is the impact of this discrimination?

- It creates mistrust and inhibits integration of young Sudanese into the wider community. This often leads to young Africans taking matters into their own hands.

The effect of religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability
5.15 Are experiences of justice different for African Australians based on religion, age, gender, sexuality or disability? Please provide reasons in your answer.

- Sometimes the outcomes expected by African Australians from the justice system are different; and
- Race is a factor in experiences of justice. African Australians can have different experiences of the legal and justice systems based on their race.

Cross-cultural training

5.16 Do workers in the justice system and law enforcement receive adequate cross-cultural awareness training? If not, what type of cross cultural training is required?

- There is not enough cross cultural training provided to Victoria Police or staff in legal Centres.

Improved community relations

5.17 In recent times some media outlets have portrayed African Australian youth as 'unruly gangs' who get in trouble with police. How can the media be encouraged to provide more balanced reporting of issues for African Australians, especially African Australian youth?

- Reporting in the media is disproportionate to reality;
- Gangs are a mix of races not usually ethno specific; and
- Negative media reporting leads to stereotyping. There needs to be more 'good news' stories published and more of a focus on young Africans who contribute positively within their community.

5.18 How can governments, service providers and communities work to break down the fear and mistrust of authority that is felt by many African Australians?

- In 2008, a Sudanese Forum was held in Wyndham to address the issues the Sudanese community was facing. The results and impact of this forum have been very successful. A copy of the forum report is attached to this submission; and

- There will be a cultural event showcasing the South Sudanese Community of Wyndham in July. This will give the wider community a better understanding of the Sudanese culture and foster positive relationships with the broader community.

5.19 How are long-term, trusting and positive relationships created between African Australians and the justice system and law enforcement?

- **Education at IHSS stage;**
- **Forums such as the one mentioned above (report attached);**
- **Local police building a relationship with the Sudanese not just multicultural liaison officers;**
- **Ongoing sustainable programs, not just tokenistic projects; and**
- **Education for service providers as well as African Australians is a key factor in maintaining positive working relationships. Community Development is another key factor that needs to be taken into account.**

5.20 Do you know of successful models of African community and law enforcement relationships?

- **As service providers we believe that every situation is different and requires a different approach. No one model can be used for every area.**
- **A successful model is the Sudanese working group of the Wyndham Humanitarian Network. The Sudanese working group is chaired by police building trust between African Australians, Police and service providers. In Wyndham, we believe that we are doing well and have a positive relationship between the South Sudanese and service providers.**