

15 December 2017

African Ministerial Working Group Secretariat  
Via email: [amwg.secretariat@dpc.vic.gov.au](mailto:amwg.secretariat@dpc.vic.gov.au)

Dear Secretariat

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Victorian African Communities Action Plan. We commend the Government on taking this proactive step, in close collaboration with local communities, towards creating more inclusive economic and social opportunities for all African Victorians.

Jesuit Social Services recognises and affirms the significant economic and social contribution that African communities have already made to Victoria. The presence of African communities has broadened our cultural diversity and enriched our social fabric. The action plan, in promoting greater inclusion, can only further enhance this contribution. For those who have arrived as humanitarian entrants, we acknowledge that their contribution has, remarkably, often taken place against the adversity of forced displacement and the challenges of resettlement in an unfamiliar country. We regret that African communities in Victoria can often be marginalised through media misreporting and the politicisation of migration, which can feed unfounded community fears.

We welcome the Victorian Government's focus on this issue and its long-term commitment, as outlined in the twelve-year plan, to constructively promote the inclusion of all African Victorians. From our experience, working alongside various African communities across several programs, we understand some of the issues they face. We stand ready to offer support to African Victorians and the Victorian Government in pursuing this action plan.

#### **Jesuit Social Services: Our work with African communities**

For 40 years Jesuit Social Services has been working to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged people, families, and communities. This includes working with successive waves of new migrant groups to improve personal resilience and build a strong sense of belonging and social cohesion. Our work has brought us into close contact with a number of African communities facing disadvantage.

- In the western suburbs of Melbourne, Jesuit Social Services delivers the **Settlement Program** (under the Australian Government's Settlement Grants Programme) to support newly arrived people, often from African backgrounds, build capacity, overcome barriers and foster a sense of belonging. Our staff work with individuals, families and groups in the areas of casework support, referrals and community development. We also administer a regular Homework Club, where volunteers offer education support to primary and secondary school students, who are primarily from families with an African cultural background.
- Based on our experiences engaging with migrant communities seeking employment, Jesuit Social Services formed a partnership with the National Australia Bank in 2009 to establish the **African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP)**. This program provides paid internships for

skilled but underemployed African migrants to showcase their skills and education and gain Australian work experience, in most cases leading to permanent employment.

- In 2011, we established **Jesuit Community College** in order to engage more effectively with highly disadvantaged and disengaged groups within the community, including newly-arrived migrants, and to support them on pathways into education, training and employment. In particular, the College promotes the social inclusion of newly-arrived migrants through the provision of English language classes.
- We also deliver the **African Visitation and Mentoring Program (AVAMP)**, providing voluntary mentoring support to people from African backgrounds who are or have been imprisoned in Victoria. Mentors are volunteer community members, many from the African community of Victoria, who are trained and supported by Jesuit Social Services to visit a participant on a fortnightly to monthly basis – both during their incarceration and after their release back into community. Mentors provide practical and emotional support and aim to develop a positive relationship with the participant that will assist their transition back into mainstream community. AVAMP strives to create circles of support and increase social connection by encouraging participants to re-engage positively with community and family, with the aim of reducing recidivism.
- Other programs relating to disadvantaged migrants have included:
  - **leadership programs** for young people from African countries
  - the **Refugee Speakers Program**
  - the **Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum**, which works to foster greater understanding and compassion towards asylum seekers and migrants within the Australian community.

Our direct experience with disadvantaged people informs our advocacy work, in giving voice to their experiences and in seeking to influence and contribute to Government thinking, policy and legislation on matters that impact them.

### **Addressing unique barriers to inclusion**

In our experience, some migrant groups (including members of African communities) have reported substantial disengagement from Australian society. Several overlapping factors contribute to this sense of disengagement, including trouble adapting to the Australian education system, an inability to find employment, a lack of supporting programs, poverty, traumatic backgrounds, and discrimination from the broader community. Psychologically distressing pre-arrival experiences can impact on their ability to connect with family and friends and to develop a sense of belonging in their new community. Past experiences of corruption and distrust towards authorities may make engaging with law enforcement agencies particularly challenging. Low literacy levels can lead to difficulty understanding new legal, social, economic and political structures. Limited knowledge of the English language is a significant barrier to social integration for some recently arrived migrants. We also note that the African community in Victoria is a diverse mix of languages, cultures and customs, and this must be considered in developing contextualised approaches (e.g. according to gender, age, migration pathways, etc).

There is a substantial need for new initiatives to address and overcome those barriers to inclusion that can be prominent among African communities. We welcome the action plan's vision to comprehensively confront these issues. While supporting all goals of the action plan, we would like to offer some comments concerning goals two, three and five.

### ***Goal two: Employment and Training***

Jesuit Social Services notes the significant barriers to employment faced by African communities, which can limit their sense of integration into the Australian community. We recognise that employment fosters broader participation in society, provides a sense of purpose, and creates opportunities to become contributing members of the community.

We welcome the Victorian Government's recent commitment and investment in a number of education, training and employment initiatives including the Jobs Victoria Employment Network, the Reconnect: Engagement and Learning Support Grants Program, the Navigator Pilot Program and Recruit Smarter initiative. As outlined in the plan, we affirm Government commitment to support communities to enter the Victorian Public Service via traineeships, cadetships, internships and apprenticeships. In recognition of this commitment by the Government and given the number of opportunities which will be available through Victorian Police over the next three years, Jesuit Social Services (through Jobs Victoria funding) is currently working with the African Australian Multicultural Employment and Youth Service (AAMEYS) and Victoria Police in partnership with Adult Multicultural Education Services, Matchworks and Victoria University, to develop a police force career transition program for people from African backgrounds.

Our partnership with the National Australia Bank in conducting the AAIP has succeeded in facilitating greater workforce participation for many African migrants. The AAIP fosters workplace inclusion for disadvantaged and underemployed skilled African migrants by addressing the initial barriers – including a recruitment landscape which is highly influenced by bias (conscious or unconscious) – which can often prevent entry into the Australian workforce. While the AAIP produces a social good, in broadening the employment prospects of disadvantaged migrants, it also provides significant benefits to the private sector in opening up an untapped labour market of talented workers and shifting perceptions in a positive way. The program has been successful because it offers the private

sector partner the competitive advantage of bringing experienced, skilled, yet underemployed, job seekers to their attention. It also serves to benefit the private sector through workplace diversification, in boosting staff engagement and in enhancing corporate reputation.

#### *African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP)*

##### **We provide African-Australians with corporate sector experience**

- There are systemic barriers to entry to the Australian corporate workplace for qualified African-Australians – including lack of Australian experience, non-recognition of qualifications, lack of business networks and bias (both conscious and unconscious).
- The program provides African-Australians with the opportunity to showcase their capabilities as well as specific development to become effective, independent professionals working in their chosen field.
- The roles include finance, IT, business administration, business analysis, corporate responsibility, project management, marketing and customer contact.
- Through AAIP, participants:
  - undertake a paid internship in their chosen field
  - immerse themselves in Australian workplace culture and build powerful professional networks
  - receive mentoring to achieve assigned tasks and duties
  - work with a coach to achieve broader career goals
  - at a minimum, obtain a professional reference at the end of their placement

##### **We offer career coaching to ensure job success beyond the program**

- With the help of NAB career coaches, AAIP's impact lasts beyond the program itself.
- Participants work with a coach to help them achieve broader careers goals and search for job opportunities both within and outside NAB once the internship is complete.
- The program has been running since 2009, with 340 participants over that period.
- 80 per cent of participants at the end of the program have found work at NAB or in their chosen field.

##### **We collaborate with business for stronger collective impact**

- AAIP shows how the social and business sectors can collaborate to achieve a stronger collective impact.
- The program delivers genuine shared value that benefits participants, NAB and the broader community – for example as role models for younger African-Australians.
- AAIP's success has been recognised with several awards, including:
  - Diversity@Work (2010)
  - Melbourne Awards – City of Melbourne (2011)
  - Australian Human Resources Institute Diversity Award (2012)
  - Victorian African Community Award (2013 and 2014)
  - Victoria's Multicultural Awards for Excellence – Business Award (2017).

Jesuit Social Services is committed to expanding dedicated corporate inclusion programs (adapted from the AAIP model and in partnership with a variety of corporate partners) in order to offer more underemployed people from African backgrounds corporate work experience and an induction into Australian workplace culture and practice.

Based on the highly successful AAIP – and with the support of \$550,000 from the Victorian Government over the next two years – we have developed the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program to help companies connect with a diverse talent pool of qualified people who seek an opportunity to obtain the corporate experience and professional networks needed to launch their careers. Our Corporate Diversity Partnerships approach is founded on the following principles, which are aligned with the directions outlined in the draft plan:

- **Partnership** – collaborating to arrive at the right approach for each business
- **Proven model** – time-limited, paid work experience with built-in mentoring and support
- **Flexibility** – extensive program or individual internships
- **Support and development** – for both interns and company employees
- **Workforce supply** – the option for companies to offer post-program employment.

With a spirit of collaboration and a shared desire to open up paid internship opportunities to talented people, we can connect the dots for companies to create a partnership that works – for everyone.

Most recently we have partnered with the Australian Taxation Office as part of their ‘Opening Doors’ initiative to offer roles across a number of disciplines (finance, accounting, commerce, economics and information technology) for professionally qualified individuals from refugee and humanitarian entrant backgrounds seeking to establish themselves in Australia. For more information on this program see: <http://corporatediversity.org.au/>.

### ***Goal three: Education***

We recognise that the effective engagement of young people from migrant backgrounds in their education can be key to successful settlement outcomes and inhibit anti-social behaviour. Disengagement from education can often be the first sign that a young person has started on a trajectory into anti-social behaviour and involvement with the youth justice system. We also recognise that success in mainstream education can be significantly challenging for young people from newly-arrived communities. We therefore support the development of programs, specifically tailored to young migrants, to foster their educational engagement.

As an example, in response to children and young people at risk of disengaging from education, Jesuit Social Services currently works in Hume/Moreland as part of the Victorian Government’s Navigator initiative. Navigator works with disengaged learners, aged between 12 and 17, to engage with them and their support networks to return them to education or training. Re-engaging vulnerable young people in educational, learning and employment pathways gives them the foundational skills and opportunities they need to flourish. Additional resources could be dedicated to programs like Navigator to ensure young people from African backgrounds are prioritised for re-engagement and support in an educational setting.

### ***Goal five: Engagement and Access***

Jesuit Social Services has extensive experience engaging with young people from African communities who have experienced social exclusion and become involved in crime. It is critical that the underlying drivers of criminal behaviour are addressed in a holistic manner. We believe that preventative approaches that adopt a community development, capacity building and restorative justice lens offer the most effective way to do this, accompanied by intensive interventions that target the young people engaged in offending behaviour, their families and communities.

For example, Jesuit Social Services' Youth Justice Group Conferencing program enables dialogue between young people who have offended, their victims and the wider community. The program is grounded in principles of restorative justice, which emphasise reparation and restoration. Youth Justice Group Conferencing is a problem-solving approach to offending that emphasises the offender's personal accountability, adopts an inclusive decision-making process that encourages participation, and aims to right the harm caused by an offence.

### **Conclusion**

Jesuit Social Services is heartened by the African Ministerial Working Group's efforts to improve the social and economic inclusion of African Victorians in our community.

We support the direction being taken in the African Communities Action Plan and are keen to collaborate constructively with African communities and the Victorian Government in implementing this important agenda and realising each of its goals, including participation on an independent body to oversee implementation.

We would welcome the opportunity to expand further on the matters raised in this submission, and look forward to continuing our positive engagement with the Working Group.

Yours sincerely



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**Acting CEO, Jesuit Social Services**