



Reintegration and resettlement of African Australians released from prison: Towards an Ubuntu framework of support

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Executive summary

Project background

The aim of this project was to inform reintegration policies and practices that will address reoffending risks and enable socioeconomic participation and inclusion of justice-involved African Australians in Victoria. A key aspect was developing a culturally responsive framework of support for African Australians involved with the justice system. This report documents findings of a 12-month pilot research project, originally titled *Reintegration and Resettlement: Post-Release Family and Community Support for African Australian Released Prisoners in Victoria*, seed funded by the Melbourne Social Equity Institute¹. The project brought together interdisciplinary academics and experienced community workers to investigate African Australians' reintegration support needs in Victoria. This research team, individually and collectively, has significant experience of working with African communities in Melbourne. The research builds on earlier work by Dr Onsando (lead and corresponding author) that focused on experiences and perspectives of African Australians in the Victorian prison system.

African Australians and the research approach

Since colonisation by Europeans, successive groups of immigrants – including those of African heritage – have made Australia their home. A common notion that describes the African worldview and identity as well as many African sociocultural values and traditions is the philosophy of Ubuntu. Some African Australians have poor resettlement outcomes, therefore increasing their likelihood of being in contact with the justice system. For such justice-involved African Australians, their reintegration into the community and society is often a function of broader resettlement contexts. The research project adapted transformative methodology guided by a social ecological framework. The recruitment of participants was mainly done through partnerships with two African community organisations provide support to African Australians who are at risk of offending or reoffending. The two organisations are Afri-Aus Care² and the Australian African Foundation for Retention and

¹ The Melbourne Social Equity Institute (MSEI) (Executive Officer, Charlene Edwards) at the University of Melbourne supports interdisciplinary research for fairer societies. MSEI brings together researchers to address disadvantages across social life, including health, education, housing, culture, work, and transport.

² The Afri-Aus Care (CEO and Founder, Selba Luka) is a community organisation consisting of a group of diverse professionals who provide reintegration and resettlement support services to culturally diverse communities, including African Australians. Afri-Aus Care applies a positive change model informed by Ubuntu philosophy to support community members.

Opportunity (AAFRO)³. Seven former prisoners, all men, were interviewed for the study. The data collected from the interview sessions were subsequently professionally transcribed and thematically analysed to generate the research findings.

Our research findings

Our findings strongly suggest that it is critical to use culturally responsive practices when supporting African Australians released from prison. Informed by the African philosophy of Ubuntu, we therefore developed the culturally responsive *Ubuntu framework of support* based on the findings. In the first key theme, 'the African Australian individual', it emerged that participants were concerned about their personal safety in prison, their post-release employment opportunities, and their relations with family and community. The second key theme, 'connecting with family', was about the kinds of support participants received from their families while they were imprisoned and after their release from prison. The third key theme, 'engaging with community', was about participants' need for more community support during imprisonment and after their release from prison. The Ubuntu framework of support consequently has three components: (1) the African Australian individual, (2) connecting with family, and (3) engaging with community. This participant summed up the sense of family and community relational connection and obligation contained in the Ubuntu framework of support: "If you struggle, I will be there for you. And if I struggle, you are there for me ... Because one hand doesn't clap by itself ... You are not alone".

Policy and practice recommendations

The Ubuntu framework of support offers culturally responsive reintegration mechanisms that are expected to address reoffending risks for African Australians released from prison. Based on the Ubuntu framework of support, we make the following policy and practice recommendations:

- Apart from guaranteeing imprisoned African Australians' personal safety in prison, authorities should provide culturally responsive programs and activities that offer sustainable rehabilitative outcomes.
- Bespoke programs designed to encourage potential employers towards providing meaningful employment opportunities that facilitate effective reintegration of African Australians into society should be established.
- Practical initiatives that acknowledge the critical role of the family should be established to encourage and enhance family connectedness for African Australians while they are imprisoned and after their release.
- Building capacities of communities to play a greater sustainable role in supporting African Australians who are in prison as well as in welcoming and reintegrating African Australians released from prison.

³ AAFRO (Managing Director, Mamadou Diamanka) is an organisation created and driven by African communities in Melbourne to build strong bridges between people from a range of cultures and the wider Australian community. AAFRO has experience of supporting and working with community members who have been in contact with the justice system in Victoria.