



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

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# Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive summary .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Project background .....	2
African Australians and the research approach .....	2
Research findings.....	3
Policy and practice recommendations .....	3
<b>Reintegration and resettlement of African Australians.....</b>	<b>4</b>
The African philosophy of Ubuntu .....	4
Resettlement outcomes for African Australians .....	5
Culturally responsive reintegration of African Australians .....	5
<b>Transformative methodology .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Recruitment of participants .....	7
Data collection and analysis .....	7
Our research participants.....	9
Project limitations and further research .....	10
<b>African Australians’ resettlement and reintegration.....</b>	<b>12</b>
The African Australian individual .....	12
Connecting with family.....	14
Engaging with community .....	16
<b>The Ubuntu framework of support .....</b>	<b>19</b>
African Australian individual component.....	20
Connecting with family component .....	21
Engaging with community component .....	21
<b>The Ubuntu reintegration practice .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>24</b>

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of The University of Melbourne.

We acknowledge the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this nation. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our University is located and where we conduct our research and teaching. We pay our respects to Ancestors and Elders, past, present, and future.

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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 Institute<sup>1</sup>. 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 Afri-Aus Care<sup>2</sup> and the Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity (AAFRO)<sup>3</sup>. These two African community organisations provide support to African Australians who are at risk of offending or reoffending. Seven former prisoners, all men, were interviewed for the study. The data

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<sup>1</sup> The Melbourne Social Equity Institute (MSEI) 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.

<sup>2</sup> The Afri-Aus Care 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.

<sup>3</sup> AAFRO 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.

collected from the interview sessions were subsequently professionally transcribed and thematically analysed to generate the research findings.

### **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.

## Reintegration and resettlement of African Australians

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the traditional owners of Australia. Indeed, Australia was a community of diverse nations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people before its colonisation by Europeans (Hollinsworth, 2006; Maddison, 2019). Since then, successive groups of immigrants, including those of African heritage, have made Australia their home. The latest Census of Population and Housing data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed that 2% (388,176 people) of Australia's population (23,401,892 people) were born in Africa; of those, 24% (94,006 people) were living in the state of Victoria (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Many Africans continue to practice their pre-immigration sociocultural ways of living even after immigrating to non-African countries. For example, in the Australian context:

*African diaspora in Australia should be seen as a complex, dynamic and continuously evolving combination of homeland identities, cultural experiences accumulated during the migration journeys and settlement experiences gained in Australia. (Ndhlovu, 2014, pp. 1-2)*

The African philosophy of Ubuntu, for many African Australians, informs and explains the various sociocultural aspects of being an African. In this research study, we considered an African Australian as a person of African heritage or descent living in Australia.

### The African philosophy of Ubuntu

The sociocultural backgrounds of people of an African heritage comprise many subcultures that cannot be interpreted by a single description. However, a common feature among many African sociocultural values and traditions is the practice of community collectiveness rather than individual ways of living (Nsubuga-Kyobe, 2007). Indeed:

*Within African traditions, the concept of belonging refers to a way of coming into existence as a communal being. ... This notion of belonging can be inferred from the African concepts of personhood, obligation and relationship with community and nature. (Woldeyes, 2018, p. 50)*

In many African traditions and cultures, family and community connectedness are a core part their collectivist sociocultural framework. One of the common notions that inform many of these African sociocultural values and traditions is the concept of Ubuntu. The African philosophy of Ubuntu is often described by the maxim "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (collectivism) as opposed to "I think, therefore I am" (individualism). According to Cornell and Muvangua (2012), we all come into the world obligated to others, and in turn these others are obligated to us. This means that Ubuntu is often about mutual obligations between an individual and the community.

The African philosophy of Ubuntu considers an individual (personhood) to be a creation of the community, the family to be a critical medium through which communal values are

expressed, and the community to be an essential gateway to active participation in society (Letseka, 2013). Ubuntu is a living ethos that enables individuals to value their own identity through communities (Hailey, 2008). According to Venter (2004) and Woldeyes (2018), Ubuntu is the philosophical belief that humanness is an essential element of human growth, and that humanity of the self is promoted through the humanity of others for the common good of society. Indeed, the Ubuntu concept of the individual not being alone but being a part of the community is central to many traditional African laws (Sachs, 2012). Some of these concepts of Ubuntu are likely to affect resettlement outcomes for African Australians.

### **Resettlement outcomes for African Australians**

For many immigrants, successful resettlement means the ability to fully participate in economic, social, cultural, and political activities in their country of residence (Valtonen, 2004). However, some immigrants in Australia experience poor resettlement outcomes, including unemployment and underemployment (Hebbani, 2014), challenges in education (Joyce, Earnest, De Mori, & Silvagni, 2010; Onsando & Billett, 2017), and social exclusion (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2009; Onsando, 2014). Many African Australians have experienced these challenges during resettlement. For example, young African Australians have faced racial profiling and harassment by the police as well as the Australian mainstream media's perpetuation of inaccurate narratives about their involvement in crime (Majavu, 2017; Ndhlovu, 2014). Many African Australians have also experienced educational and employment challenges. For example, young African Australians have faced increased surveillance in schools, disrupted education, and lack of employment opportunities (Benier, Blaustein, Johns, & Maher, 2018; Shepherd, Newton, & Farquharson, 2018). The Victorian African Communities Action Plan (Department of Premier & Cabinet, 2018) reported that the topic of African Australians in the justice system is a concern for many African communities in Victoria. Prison data indicated that the number of prisoners born in Africa was increasing. In the five-year period from 2014 to 2018, the number of African-born prisoners in Victoria rose from 186 to 400 people (Corrections Victoria, 2018). According to Onsando (2018), some of the imprisoned African Australians faced significant challenges while in prison. For many African Australians who have been to prison, their post-release reintegration into the community often occurs within some of these adverse resettlement contexts.

### **Culturally responsive reintegration of African Australians**

Reintegration is the process of transitioning from imprisonment towards a crime-free lifestyle or desistance in the community (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012). This means that effective reintegration may reduce recidivism rates in a population. Effective reintegration has been shown to rely on not only individual effort or social-structural support but also opportunities for community acceptance and participation (Johns 2015; Johns, 2018;

Victorian Ombudsman, 2015). In a study that focused on experiences and perspectives of African Australians in the Victorian prison system, it was recommended that

*... programs that focus on supporting African prisoners, be expanded to encourage active participation of prisoners' family members and local African communities to build meaningful supportive networks around prisoners before and after they are released. (Onsando, 2018, p. 7)*

Such reintegration programs involving families and communities can entail activities relevant to sociocultural values and practices of African Australians. Forson (2019) suggested that young African Australians could be reintegrated into society more effectively by engaging them in culturally responsive programs conducted by African Australian communities. Culturally responsive programs can be described as mechanisms and activities that are respectful of, and relevant to, the beliefs, sociocultural practices, and linguistic needs of culturally diverse communities (Department of Health, 2009). The African Think Tank (2019) suggested that African Australians released from custody be better reintegrated into society through Ubuntu practices that emphasise the importance of family and the community. Effective reintegration and resettlement of African Australians therefore requires culturally responsive approaches, including support from the family, the community, and society.



## Transformative methodology

The research project adapted a transformative methodology. Data were collected and analysed using a social ecological framework. Transformative approaches to conducting scientific inquiries involve using social justice belief systems to engage culturally diverse as well as marginalised members of society (Mertens, 2009, 2010). Our research participants, African Australians released from custody, can be described as culturally diverse and likely to be marginalised. Several studies (for example, Benier, Blaustein, Johns, & Maher, 2018; Majavu, 2017; and Shepherd, Newton, & Farquharson, 2018) indicated that young African Australians can be described as culturally diverse as well as marginalised members of society who are at risk of offending or reoffending. Furthermore, the transformative methodology advances culturally responsive data collection methods that:

*... reflect a deep understanding of the cultural issues involved, builds trust to obtain valid data, makes modification that may be necessary to collect data from various groups, and links the data collected to social action. (Mertens, 2009, p. 234)*

For these reasons, informed by the African philosophy of Ubuntu, the transformative methodological approach provided a culturally responsive platform for approaching and recruiting our research participants.

### Recruitment of participants

Research participants were mainly recruited through partnerships with Afri-Aus Care and AAFRO, the two African community organisations that support African Australians at risk of offending or reoffending. In preparation for obtaining their informed consent to participate in the study, potential participants were given a document that succinctly outlined the research process, including the purpose and objectives of the study, details of what the research study involved, details of how their interests and concerns were to be addressed, and issues of privacy and confidentiality during and after the study. Only after the prospective participants indicated full understanding of the procedures explained by researchers, were they requested to sign an informed consent form. Hereafter, potential participants became full participants, with knowledge of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage. Participants were given the opportunity to choose a preferred and appropriate interview site so that the interviews could be held in environments considered mutually comfortable.

### Data collection and analysis

Guided by the transformative methodology, the research study used face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews to engage with seven African Australians who had been released from prison in Victoria. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Razaviagh (2000), semi-structured interviews provide a more in-depth personal understanding of participants' experiences. Interviews were deemed an appropriate data collection method because they assisted in

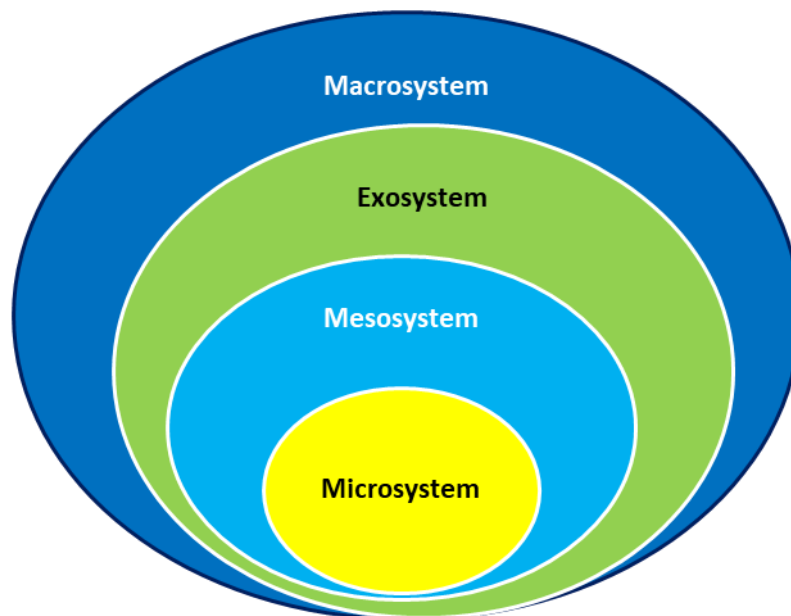
obtaining an in-depth understanding of reintegration and resettlement experiences and support. We also used a social ecological framework to explore the role of family and community support for participants in the study.

### A social ecological framework

Social ecological approaches draw attention to the multiple nested and interdependent levels of the nature of human development and the reciprocal interactions at the personal, relational, and collective levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Henderson & Baffour, 2015).

Bronfenbrenner (1977) described the four nested and interrelated social environments in the ecology of human development as microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A social ecological framework



The *microsystem* refers to an individual and their immediate environment of family, friends, and neighbourhood; the *mesosystem* refers to connections between microsystemic settings (e.g., between family members and their local neighbourhood); the *exosystem* refers to links between settings outside the individual that have some impact on them (e.g., links between family members' work lives and their community associations); and the *macrosystem* refers to the broader sociocultural setting and community norms, customs, beliefs, and resources. In a later work, Bronfenbrenner (1995) added a fifth temporal dimension to his ecological theory of human development, the *chronosystem*. For the purposes of this study, however, we have used a simplified version of the four intersecting ecologies, leaving out the chronosystem.

The social ecological framework adapted for data collection and analysis in this research considered participants as individuals (microsystem) embedded in social relationships and

interactions with their families (mesosystem), their friends and communities (exosystem), and the wider society (macrosystem). The data collected from the interview sessions were professionally transcribed and thematically analysed to better understand participants' resettlement and reintegration needs. Guided by the adapted social ecological framework and informed by the African philosophy of Ubuntu, the thematic analysis focused on the role of family members and their communities in supporting African Australian individuals who have been released from prison.

### **Our research participants**

Seven African Australian former prisoners, all men, were interviewed for this study. All participants immigrated to Australia as refugees and were now either resettled as Australian citizens or held a permanent Australian visa. A refugee is a person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2007, p. 16), has fled from their country of origin. All our participants were multilingual because they each spoke 'well' or 'very well' their indigenous African languages, another language, and English. The highest educational qualification among participants was a high school certificate; none of the participants were pursuing any form of education. All participants indicated that they were well prepared for life after prison and reintegration into the community.

The following are some other attributes of our research participants:

- The average age of our participants was 31 years; the youngest participant was 23 years and the oldest was 44 years.
- At the time of the interview, participants had been out of prison for an average of nearly two years.
- Only two of the participants stated that they were 'in a relationship' or 'married'; the others were either single, separated, or divorced.
- Apart from two participants who stated that their imprisonment experience was 'neither good nor bad', all the others said that their experience in prison was 'not good' at all.
- Participants had very poor employment outcomes. Only one was employed on a casual basis, while the rest were unemployed and looking for work.
- Most participants indicated that they were strongly connected to their families. All participants, except one, stated that they were either 'close' or 'very close' with their families.
- Most participants were actively engaged with their communities. Only two participants were 'not active at all' in their communities.

Table 1 presents a summary of some of the characteristics of our research participants. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality.

### **Project limitations and further research**

Our potential participants, African Australians with imprisonment experience in Victoria, can be described as a hard-to-reach group. Participants in this project indicated that people who have been released from prison are often isolated because of the shame and stigma attached to being imprisoned. The limited project time for accessing and recruiting these participants was therefore a challenge. Using our partnerships with African community organisations, we nevertheless managed to interview seven out of the planned 10 participants for the project. Another limitation of our project was that all our research participants were men, so we had no point of comparison along gendered lines. This limitation points to the need for further research with both men and women to enable nuanced identification of the key elements of the role of family and community support in the reintegration of African Australians. Further research is also required to refine and advance the Ubuntu framework of support we developed from our findings as a culturally responsive reintegration framework for African Australians and other culturally diverse communities.

*Table 1: Demographic characteristics of research participants*

Pseudonym	Age (years)	Post-release duration	Imprisonment experience	Marital status	Living with	Family connectedness	Community engagement	Employment status
Apollo Rafiki	36	1.5 years	Not good	Separated	Housemates	Very close	Active	Unemployed, looking for work
Hamza Mustafa	44	1 year	Not good	Divorced	Friends	Not close	Active	Unemployed, looking for work
Kefa Lual	25	1.75 years	Neither good nor bad	In a relationship	Partner	Close	Not active at all	Unemployed, looking for work
Yusefi Musa	23	2 months	Neither good nor bad	Single	Family	Very close	Active	Employed, casual
Dida Madit	26	6 months	Not good	Married	No one	Close	Not active at all	Unemployed, looking for work
Nesta Abraham	33	11 months	Not good	Single	Family	Very close	Very active	Unemployed, looking for work
Deng Buol	30	6 years	Not good	Single	No one	Close	Active	Unemployed, looking for work

## African Australians’ resettlement and reintegration

The interview sessions focused on resettlement and reintegration experiences and perspectives of African Australians released from prison. Three key themes emerged from the data: (1) the African Australian individual, (2) connecting with family, and (3) engaging with community.

### The African Australian individual

The key theme ‘the African Australian individual’ consisted of the sub-themes of ‘personal safety in prison’ and ‘employment challenges after prison’. The African Australian individual theme, sub-themes, description, and representative quotes are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: The African Australian individual

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Representative quotes
The African Australian individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal safety in prison</li> <li>Employment challenges after prison</li> </ul>	Participants’ personal feelings of distress due to a lack of personal safety in prison and due to their chances of finding meaningful employment after their release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>And then you have to be careful and you have to lock your door properly. ... A lot [of fighting], every single day</li> <li>I have to get a job, other people have to trust me ... I am changed.</li> </ul>

### Personal safety in prison

All participants, apart from two who said that their imprisonment experience was ‘neither good nor bad’, described their experiences in prison as being ‘not good’ at all. Apollo Rafiki mentioned the regular fights among prisoners and the need for one to take personal safety measures to ensure their personal well-being in prison. Apollo was a 36-year-old married African Australian who was released from prison one-and-a-half years before the interview. Apollo described the regular fights in prison and some of the subsequent measures that prisoners took to address their sense of insecurity in prison:

*And then you have to be careful and you have to lock your door properly. ... A lot [of fighting], every single day maybe it going to happen fighting for 10 times, but after every fight, everyone run in. (Apollo Rafiki)*

Another participant, Hamza Mustafa, said that the many fights in prison motivated the African Australian prisoners form groups for their safety. Hamza was a 44-year-old divorced African Australian participant who was released from prison one year before the interview. Hamza said the fights in prison were often not reported to authorities because of a fear of violent reprisal from fellow prisoners:

*So, you have to have someone back you when you got in trouble. Yeah, it is for their protection. If one of them being attacked, then they have to tell them. ... No, you cannot*

*[report the fights to authorities], because when you say something, all the criminal they turn against you. So, whatever you see, you don't say anything. (Hamza Mustafa)*

Furthermore, apart from emphasising that prisons have a lot of “bad people”, Hamza provided an overview of his prison experience and suggested that an individual can use their challenging prison experiences to personally reflect on their “mistake” as a way to reintegrate into the community:

*Prison, it is not a good place, but it is a good place to learn for your mistake and also you value yourself to how you went wrong and how you can come back. So, there are two ways you can go and learn in prison. Or otherwise, if you want to be bad, you have to be bad, or if you learn go back to be good, it will be good, because this place a lot of criminal, the bad people. (Hamza Mustafa)*

Most participants described their experiences in prison as being ‘not good’ at all. The participants described personal feelings of insecurity mostly due to fights and violence among prisoners. They also explained the need to set up personal safety measures that ensured their well-being in prison.

### Employment challenges after prison

Participants had very poor post-release employment outcomes; only one was employed on a casual basis, while the rest were unemployed and looking for work. For example, Deng Buol, who lived alone and was released from prison six years before the interview, was still unemployed and looking for work. Deng stated:

*[B]est support when you come out of prison ... looking for some type of work or employment and so looking for is first thing is to get a job. (Deng Buol)*

Deng highlighted the importance of having a job after being released from prison by describing it as the “best support” that one can get when reintegrating into society. Hamza similarly stated that, after his release from prison, he was a changed person who was “not drinking anymore” and was keen to find employment and reintegrate into society:

*Yeah, the challenge is to be integrated in the community, like I have to get a job, other people have to trust me, I'm not drinking anymore, and I am changed. (Hamza Mustafa)*

Other participants reported being denied employment opportunities because of their prison record. Nesta Abraham described how he failed to get the job because a potential employer discovered that he had been to prison. Nesta was a single 33-year-old unemployed participant who was released from prison 11 months before the interview and was looking for work. In relation to the unsuccessful job interview, Nesta stated:

*My first job interview when I came out from prison ... And my guts told me, no, I'm not going to get this job. ... when I finished and then mum was, 'How do you went?' I say, 'Wow. I don't think I'm going to get this job because the way the guy was looking at me. I feel like they told him that this guy just came out of prison'. (Nesta Abraham)*

Participants had very poor post-release employment outcomes. They stated that the most important post-release support they needed was assistance in finding meaningful employment to enable them to fully participate in society. Other participants reported being denied employment opportunities because of their prison record. In all, participants expressed personal feelings of distress due to a lack of personal safety in prison and due to limited chances of finding meaningful employment after their release.

### Connecting with family

The key theme ‘connecting with family’ consisted of ‘family support in prison’ and ‘post-release family support’ sub-themes. The ‘connecting with family’ theme, sub-themes, description, and representative quotes are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Connecting with family

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Representative quotes
Connecting with family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family support in prison</li> <li>Post-release family support</li> </ul>	Participants’ strong connections with their families and appreciation for the support they received from their families while they were in prison and after they were released	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yeah. Oh, they supported me a lot. My mum, my sisters, and my father and friend of mine</li> <li>And if I need anything, they have to help me out, [for example] to drive me to work.</li> </ul>

Most participants indicated that they were strongly connected to their families. All participants except one stated that they were either ‘close’ or ‘very close’ to their families. Similarly, apart from one participant, all participants stated that they either received ‘some support’ or ‘a lot of support’ from their families while they were in prison and after they were released from prison.

### Family support in prison

Obtaining family support while participants were in prison was an important aspect of addressing their reintegration and resettlement outcomes. Participants mentioned their mother, father, wife, brother, sister, children, uncle, and aunt as people they considered family. For example, Nesta lived with his mother and sisters and a friend who was ‘very close’ and very supportive and offered him words of encouragement when he was in prison:

*Yeah. Oh, they supported me a lot. My mum, my sisters, and my father and friend of mine ... [They said] ‘We thought that you were the last person that would go in’. Yeah, they give me advice all the time and talk to me just to keep my head up, don’t go back again. (Nesta Abraham)*

Nesta also extended his description of family to include other people with whom he shared his struggles and with whom he engaged in reciprocal support:



*And I am the kind of person that likes to meet new people, make them welcome and if you go with me, you're one of my family. ... And if you struggle, I will be there for you. And if I struggle, you are there for me and that is what I call family. Because one hand doesn't clap by itself. ... And then we share – idea is if struggling give them advice. ... You are not alone. (Nesta Abraham)*

Other participants also received support from their families while in prison. For example, Yusefi lived with his mother, brother, and sisters, with whom he was 'very close' and who provided 'a lot of support' when he was in prison. Yusefi Musa was a 23-year-old participant who was single and was released from prison two months before the interview. However, because of the humiliation and stigma of being imprisoned, Yusefi did not allow his family members to visit him in prison:

*I didn't want them to visit me. I didn't want them to see me in there. I don't want them to come and visit me. ... Yeah. And disappointment. Regret. I felt I had let them down. They expected better from me, and you also expect better for yourself. (Yusefi Musa)*

Similarly, Apollo explained that he discouraged his family from visiting him in prison because the prison where he was being held was very far from where his family lived. He instead preferred talking to his family over the phone:

*I say, no. ... because they would want to come visit me [in prison], but I thought Ararat is from city to Ararat, four hours driving. ... But I just calling every week, two times, calling on the phone, we are talking. (Apollo Rafiki)*

Participants received different kinds of family support while in prison. However, some participants did not allow their families to visit them in prison often because of the stigma attached to being imprisoned. Participants also described receiving family support while in prison an essential factor in facilitating their reintegration into society.

### Post-release family support

For many participants, a major personal concern about life after leaving prison was how to relate and engage with family members. For example, Hamza was particularly distressed about losing contact with his children because he "was in jail":

*I think it is about my children, because I was in jail and I could not claim my children to be my care ... they [i.e., the government] have got a right to take them until they turn 18. So, it did affect my children and I could not do anything, and I was feel stressed. (Hamza Mustafa)*

However, other participants received post-release support from their families through, for example, transport and accommodation as well as assistance in navigating outstanding legal matters. Apollo lived in shared accommodation and was 'very close' to his family who provided him with the support he needed:

*They support because, like, your family is your family. Your friends are different than your family. So, someone says your family, it's your family. Whatever they are bad, but it's your family. (Apollo Rafiki)*

Apollo emphasised the inextricable relationship an individual has with their family by stating that “your family is your family”. Indeed, Apollo suggested that he needed to reciprocate his family members’ support of him by supporting his family in any way he could. Similarly, Yusefi stated that his family provided him ‘a lot of support’ when he was in and out of prison:

*Yeah, I was calling them, and they were telling me to keep my head up, and whatnot. If I needed money, they sent me money. ... Yeah, definitely [my family has been supportive]. Being there for me. And supporting me in moving ahead. And if I need anything, they have to help me out, [for example] to drive me to work. (Yusefi Musa)*

Participants indicated that they were strongly connected to their families and received different kinds of family support after they were released from prison. They expressed gratitude for and satisfaction with the support they received, adding that there was nothing more they could ask for.

### **Engaging with community**

The key theme ‘Engaging with community’ consisted of the ‘community support in prison’ and ‘post-release community support’ sub-themes. The ‘engaging with community’ theme, sub-themes, description, and representative quotes are summarised in Table 4.

*Table 4: Engaging with community*

Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Representative quotes
Engaging with community	• Community support in prison	Communities often stigmatising, isolating, and not offering any meaningful support to participants while they were in prison and after their release	• Lot of kids back there [in prison] and need help and my community ... they did not [help]
	• Post-release community support		• When I come out, no support ... the community was not happy.

Most participants stated that they were actively engaged with their communities. Apart from two participants who were ‘not active at all’, the others were either ‘active’ or ‘very active’ in their local communities. Similarly, two participants received ‘some support’ while others received ‘no support’ at all from their communities while they were in prison and after their release from prison.

### **Community support in prison**

Participants said that they received very little community support while they were in prison. For example, Yusefi said that his community did not support him at all while he was

imprisoned; instead, he appreciated the motivation and social support received from fellow prisoners:

*We go gym together when I am feeling down and we would talk, encourage each other to do better. ... but I had people that I had known since from being younger already in there too. (Yusefi Musa)*

Some of Yusefi's friends in prison were individuals he had acquainted with in the community before they were imprisoned. Yusefi acknowledged that some of his fellow prisoners offered their support by socialising with and motivating him. Another participant, Nesta, said that his community did not support him at all while he was in prison. Nesta was very concerned about the many juvenile African Australians who were incarcerated in adult prisons. He was critical towards his community and towards community organisations' lack of support for young African Australians in prison:

*[T]here is this CALD<sup>4</sup> community, they just care about themselves. ... As long as they are claiming money, you know, that is what matters to them. ... I have feel like because there were a lot of kids back there [in prison] and need help and my community, they claim a lot of money but really they did not [help], because if they get help all that stuff [juvenile imprisonment] should be stopped years ago. (Nesta Abraham)*

For various reasons, participants received very little community support while in prison yet these kinds of support are an important aspect in prisoners' subsequent reintegration into society.

### Post-release community support

Some participants stated that, after their release from prison, a few of their friends extended their support by encouraging them to once again reengage with community activities. Most participants, however, stated that their communities did not support them. Instead, community members often isolated them because of the shame and stigma attached to being imprisoned. For example, Apollo said his community did not offer any kind support to him after he was released from prison. He made efforts to isolate himself from the community because "the community was not happy" with him:

*When I come out, no support, but I realise I want to be close to my family, the community was not happy. So, I have to stay away a little bit from them, because they can't found what I am doing. (Apollo Rafiki)*

Similarly, Hamza was concerned of his community's stigmatisation of people who have been released from prison and who were made to "look lower". Hamza hoped to be welcomed back to the community, however, he stated that his community did not offer support to facilitate his reintegration into society:

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<sup>4</sup> CALD stands for 'culturally and linguistically diverse'.

*They [community] hope they need me to be back to me in my normal place ... Yeah, there is a big difference [on how I am perceived by the community], because I look lower ... I hurt them, So, I try to start from the scratch. (Hamza Mustafa)*

Some participants also suggested that the disconnect between young African Australians and their communities was exacerbated by a lack of interest for community activities among the former. For example, Deng, who was 'close' to his supportive family, said his community provided him some post-release support. However, he stated that young people in his community were not necessarily interested in engaging with community activities:

*Oh, I was never into the community anyway all this time. ... Yeah, so not so much community things. ... I was in an age that community stuff was not something satisfying. ... I think the community after the age of 35 then some people are start joining them, but the youth and stuff like, is hard. (Deng Buol)*

Deng was concerned about how his community looked down upon him, shamed his family, and labelled him a "criminal" even though he had served his term in prison. Similarly, Kefa Lual was anxious about his community "talking too much" about his imprisonment. Kefa was a 25-year-old African Australian who was in a relationship and was released from prison nearly two years before the interview. Kefa lived with his partner and was 'close' to his family, who gave him some support both in and out of prison. However, he was 'not active at all' in his community, which did not provide him any meaningful support. In all, participants' communities often stigmatised, isolated, and did not offer any meaningful support while they were in prison and after their release.

## The Ubuntu framework of support

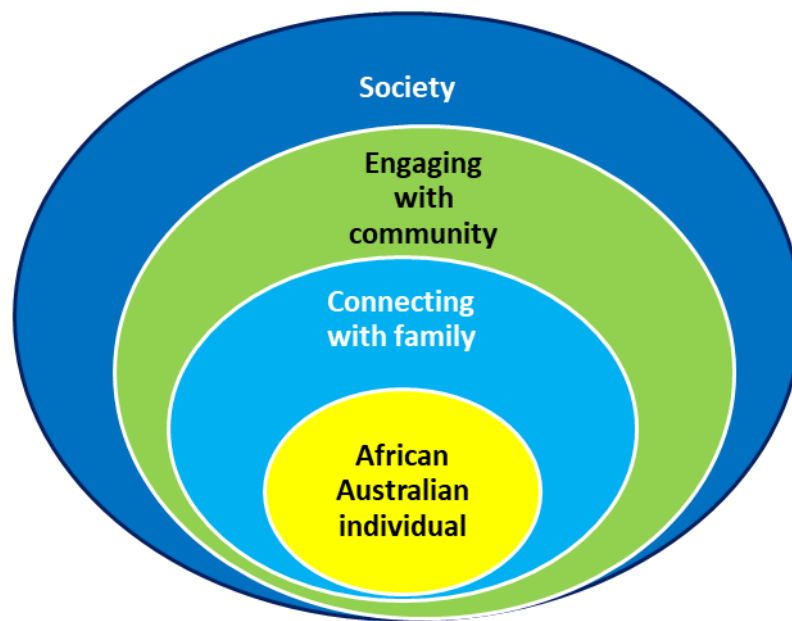
The *Ubuntu framework of support* is developed from the research findings obtained through the social ecological framework and informed by the African philosophy of Ubuntu. The Ubuntu framework of support has three components drawn from the key themes of our research findings: (1) the African Australian individual, (2) connecting with family, and (3) engaging with community. The ‘society’ component represents resettlement contexts for African Australians. Table 5 summarises the descriptions and deductions of the three components that form the Ubuntu framework of support.

*Table 5: Developing the Ubuntu framework of support*

Component	Description	Deduction
The African Australian individual	Participants’ personal feelings of distress due to a lack of personal safety in prison and due to their chances of finding meaningful employment after their release	There is an urgent need for personal challenges confronting African Australians in and out of prison to be addressed through culturally responsive mechanisms involving support from families and communities as well as prison authorities and society.
Connecting with family	Participants’ strong connections with their families and appreciation for the support they received from their families while they were in prison and after they were released	Family connectedness should be encouraged and enhanced through culturally responsive policies and practices that acknowledge the critical role of the family in supporting African Australians.
Engaging with community	Communities often stigmatising, isolating, and not offering any meaningful support to participants while they were in prison and after their release	Approaches that enable communities to provide culturally responsive support to African Australians before and after their release from prison should be encouraged.

Similar to the social ecological framework, the African philosophy of Ubuntu explores multiple levels of interactions and symbiotic interrelationships between individuals and their social environment. According to Letseka (2013), the human and ethical relationships in the African philosophy of Ubuntu are about the symbiotic relationships between personhood, family, community, and society. The African philosophy of Ubuntu can therefore be applied to the social ecological framework to achieve a better understanding of the interrelationships between African Australians who have been released from prison (microsystems), their families (mesosystem), their friends and communities (exosystem), and the wider society (macrosystem). As Figure 2 shows, the Ubuntu framework of support is informed by the culturally responsive African philosophy of Ubuntu superimposed on the social ecological framework.

Figure 2: The Ubuntu framework of support



The Ubuntu framework of support focuses on the interrelated social environments of the individual, family, community, and society through three components: (1) the African Australian individual, (2) connecting with family, and (3) engaging with community. The 'society' component represents resettlement contexts for African Australians.

### **African Australian individual component**

The African Australian individual component of the Ubuntu framework of support (see Figure 2) refers to providing Ubuntu support to the individual. This component is derived from the first key theme of the 'the African Australian individual'. Participants expressed personal feelings of distress due to a lack of personal safety in prison and due to limited chances of finding meaningful employment after their release. There is, therefore, an urgent need for personal challenges confronting African Australians in and out of prison to be addressed through culturally responsive mechanisms involving support from families and communities as well as prison authorities and society. The African philosophy of Ubuntu, as a culturally responsive concept, considers an individual (personhood) as a creation of the community (Letseka, 2013). According to Hailey (2008), Ubuntu recognises an individual's status as a human being who is worthy of receiving respect, dignity, and acceptance from other members of the family, community, and society. It has been well documented that distressed individuals are more likely to offend as well as reoffend (Payne, 2007; Shepherd, Newton, & Farquharson, 2018), being employed reduces the likelihood of offending or reoffending (Drabsch, 2006; Shepherd, Newton, & Farquharson, 2018), and family disconnection is a key criminogenic factor for young African Australian offenders (Shepherd, Newton, & Farquharson, 2018). In the Ubuntu philosophy, addressing reintegration

concerns is seen as giving individuals the opportunity to reconnect with the community after having “fallen away from sociality of others” (Cornell & Muvangua, 2012, p. 5).

The African Australian individual component of the Ubuntu framework of support can inform culturally responsive policies and practices that mitigate reoffending risks for African Australian individuals released from prison. For example, apart from guaranteeing their personal safety, prison authorities should provide culturally responsive programs and activities that offer rehabilitative outcomes for imprisoned African Australians. Additionally, bespoke programs should be implemented that encourage potential employers to provide meaningful employment opportunities that facilitate the reintegration of African Australians into society.

### **Connecting with family component**

The connecting with family component of the Ubuntu framework of support (see Figure 2) refers to the family’s provision of support to the African Australian individual. This component is derived from the second key theme of ‘connecting with family’. Participants stated that they had strong connections with their families and appreciated the support they received from their families while they were in prison and after they were released. Family connectedness should therefore be encouraged and enhanced through culturally responsive policies and practices that acknowledge the critical role of the family in supporting African Australians. In the African philosophy of Ubuntu, the family is considered a critical primary institution of formative moral development and a medium where expressions of communal values are practised (Letseka, 2013). Ubuntu, as a culturally responsive concept, is manifested through family relationships that are nurturing, respectful, and life enhancing and are affirmed through the humanity of other people (Ramose, 2002). Isolated and socially excluded individuals are often unable to fully participate in and contribute to society after being released from prison (Hamilton-Smith & Vogel, 2012). According to Letseka (2013), in most African cultures that practice Ubuntu, the family is extended to include great-grand parents, grandparents, fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, children, and other relatives.

The connecting with family component of the Ubuntu framework of support can inform culturally responsive policies and practices that appreciate the importance of family connectedness and address reintegration needs for African Australians released from prison. Practical initiatives that acknowledge the critical role of the family should be taken to encourage and enhance family connectedness for African Australians while they are imprisoned and after their release.

### **Engaging with community component**

The engaging with community component of the Ubuntu framework of support (see Figure 2) is about the community’s provision of support to the African Australian individual. This

component is derived from the key theme of 'engaging with community'. Communities often stigmatised and isolated and did not offer any meaningful support to participants while they were in prison and after their release. Therefore, approaches that acknowledge the critical role that communities play for African Australians and enable communities to provide culturally responsive support to African Australians before and after their release from prison should be encouraged. The Ubuntu philosophy, as a culturally responsive phenomenon, holds that the community is essential to intersubjectivity and that a person is incomplete unless they are actively connected with the society or culture of which they are a part (Letseka, 2013). A common attribute of Ubuntu is the way that it enables individuals to value their own identity through their relationship with the community. Hence, in Ubuntu, the individual and community are always in the process of coming into being (Cornell & van Marle, 2012; Hailey, 2008). According to Moore, Stuewig, and Tangney (2016), individuals who have served time in prison are a highly stigmatised group who are often socially excluded from community participation. This makes it challenging for them to reintegrate and be part of the community. Yet, according to Cornell and Muvangua (2012), ethical relationships in Ubuntu are rooted by a community that is inscribed in individuals.

The engaging with community component of the Ubuntu framework of support can inform culturally responsive policies and practices that recognise the importance of communities in addressing reintegration needs in support of African Australians released from prison. This should involve building the capacity of African Australian communities (e.g., through community leaders) to play a greater sustainable role in supporting African Australians who are in prison as well as welcoming and reintegrating African Australians who were released from prison.



## The Ubuntu reintegration practice

The project aimed at informing reintegration policies and practices that effectively addressed reoffending risks and socioeconomic participation and inclusion of justice-involved African Australians in Victoria. It emerged that there is an urgent need for personal challenges confronting African Australians who are in and out of prison to be addressed through culturally responsive mechanisms involving families, communities, prison authorities, and society. Family connectedness for justice-involved African Australians should be encouraged and enhanced through culturally responsive policies and practices that acknowledge the critical role of the family in supporting African Australians. More support is required for communities to provide culturally responsive support to African Australians before and after their release from prison. The culturally responsive Ubuntu framework of support consisting of – the African Australian individual, connecting with family, and engaging with community – can inform effective reintegration policies and practices for supporting African Australians released from prison.

Based on the Ubuntu framework of support, we made the following 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.

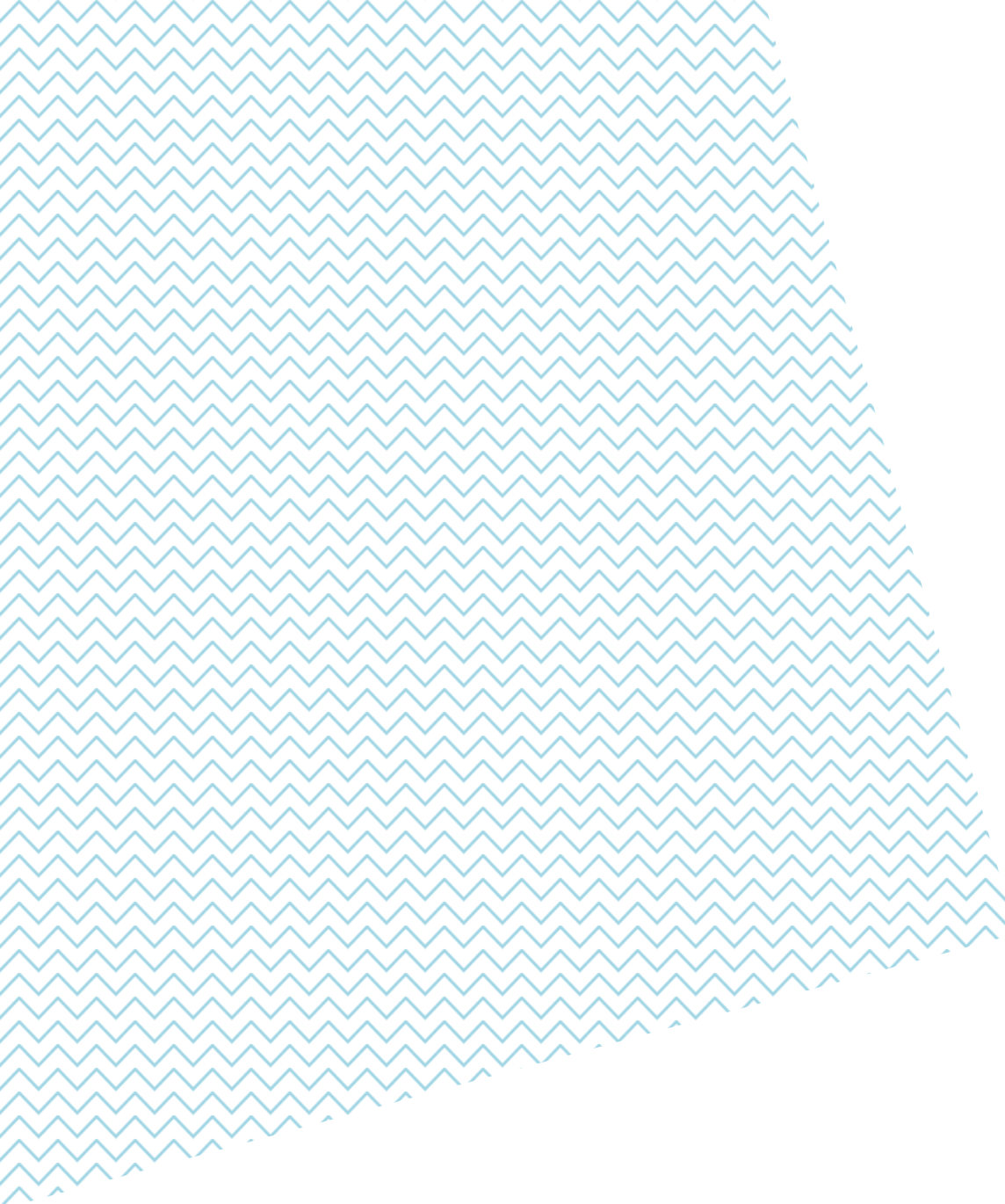
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