THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME.

Report of the FKCLC Peer Advocacy Outreach Project on racial profiling across Melbourne

“Can you see all these marks? It’s from them”
(research participant)
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the FKCLC and the funders are not responsible for the content of this report.

*Ben Bodna (1935 – 2008) was a passionate supporter of the rights of
people who were disadvantaged. This commitment was demonstrated
through his work as a Probation Officer, Superintendent of a Youth
Training Centre, head of the State Welfare Department, Victoria’s first
Public Advocate, and as a supporter of many community organisations.

We acknowledge the First Peoples of Australia and the Traditional
Owners of the land on which this project was undertaken and pay
our respects to elders past and present.
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1. Summary

Racialised policing has again made international headlines after recent multiple murders of young black men in the United States. This has led to the galvanising of black communities and human rights groups to once again protest against the unjust system that allows white police officers to get away with murder. Across all western countries issues of race - especially in the policing context, are generally reported as tensions between ethnic minorities and individual police officers. However, racialised policing reflects the attitudes of the State towards minority communities more broadly.

This report focuses on the policing experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities broadly, and specifically on young black men in Melbourne. This group is acutely aware of the impacts of racialised policing on the lives and liberty of marginalised communities. At the outset of this project, we hoped to capture the experiences of young people (in Melbourne) as well as community development workers who support those young people.

We wanted to find out how knowledgeable and equipped Melbourne’s youth workers, social workers, community development workers were to support young people who might have experienced racialised policing.

Ten young people and ten service providers were interviewed using a set of open-ended questions that focused on:
- What was the level of police contact
- What were the perceived reasons for that police contact
- What actions were taken by young person/worker
- Impacts/feelings arising from police contact
- What safety strategies are young people using
- What supports available/in place
- Sense of hope for change
- The likelihood of making a formal complaint
- Young people’s knowledge of the complaints processes
- Other help sought by young people
- What are the service gaps & barriers
- Training needs for youth workers & capacity building ideas for the sector
Key findings

Key findings from our conversations with young people include:

1. Young men of colour have had negative experiences at the hands of the police. These range from serious assaults to constant harassment and ridicule in public;

2. These experiences have resulted in negative mental health outcomes as well as criminalisation for those young people, who expressed feelings of not being welcome in society, anxiety, isolation, paranoia and fear;

3. Other impacts of racialised policing include mistrust by young people of not only police but the system as a whole;

4. Young people felt that institutionalised racism was part of a broader issue of racism within society as a whole and that a holistic review of the criminal justice system was required. They also identified education as being central to reform and cultural change within Victoria police;

5. Young people felt that lack of accountability is a serious issue within the police force, as the complaints mechanisms are all in a closed loop within the criminal justice systems machinery.

Key findings from our conversations with Community Development Service Providers include:

1. All workers we spoke to had young clients who reported or disclosed abuse or mistreatment by police;

2. Workers demonstrated a concerning lack of awareness of the racial profiling experienced by their clients. There was a lack of understanding of the term and the impact it has not only on the client but the family and community as a whole;

3. As a sector, racial profiling is not acknowledged as a community development issue and there is not much understanding of what the practice is along with its personal impacts or broader ramifications for society;

4. Some community groups have recognised the symptoms of criminalisation and racial profiling such as mass incarceration. They have not been able to identify the issue as criminalisation of their community. They are currently still enquiring about what is leading to large numbers of their youth entering the criminal justice system;

5. Further enquiry and research into how the youth and community development sector respond to racialised policing of their client groups is required. The anecdotal evidence is present but there hasn’t been a comprehensive research study conducted yet;

6. Community Development workers urgently need training about racial profiling, police powers and the complaints process. This also means that the youth, community development and social welfare sector can assist the legal sector to achieve better legal outcomes for young people who are victimised.

In short, young people routinely disclosed stories of racialised policing to the community workers they trusted. Almost universally, those workers were not equipped, mandated or skilled enough to do anything about those disclosures.
Introduction

We are Daniel Haile Michael and Maki Issa. Ten years ago we started our fight against racial profiling. Our experiences of racial profiling do not define us, but our experiences at the hands of police have greatly impacted our lives. We are brothers, sons, community organisers, university students, actors, small business managers, advocates, and much more. We want to share our story and our experiences with others, especially young people who are right now facing racialised policing.

We have resisted and fought against racial profiling in a range of ways. We want other young people to know that they can too. To do this, young people need support from the broader community. In 2013 we were lead applicants in the Federal Court Race Discrimination case, which resulted in commitments by Victoria Police to change its practices and policing of diverse communities. We had both experienced racial abuse and profiling at the hands of police in Flemington since 2005. We were able to keep going with this case because we understood this was an opportunity to spark change. We had a vision of ending police brutality in our community but the process of achieving that was not evidently clear to us. We did not know what the odds were and the hurdles involved in civil litigation.

Time was a challenge, the case went for so long that we had to pause whatever was happening in our lives a few times to engage with lawyers. How we feel about the outcomes of the case is bittersweet. Bitter that the system was so rigid that it didn’t allow us to effect immediate change nor acknowledge the injustices committed. It was sweet as it created public debate and a commitment by Victoria Police to do better.

We hoped that things had changed since this case. We spoke to young people and youth and community workers in different parts of Melbourne to ask them about their experiences and how different communities are responding to racialised policing. The African-Australian community has been deeply affected by racial profiling – but our communities are not the only ones. Aboriginal communities have a long history of racist treatment by police. The Vietnamese communities and other newly arrived communities have also historically faced this mistreatment. We know that pacific-islander communities are also currently experiencing racialised policing in Victoria.
3.1 Background

Growing up in the Flemington housing estates there was never a moment without event. The densely populated estate consisted of more than 4,000 people living in four 20 story towers and about a dozen 4 story flats. Four in ten spoke an African language at home and half the residents were under 25 years of age. The public amenities included a community centre, a couple of small parks, a rundown half-court basketball court and an oval. The multicultural community has been home to many newly arrived communities and has a long history of troubled relationship between young people and the police.

At times those tensions have resulted in fatalities. The public spaces in and around the estates were the main battleground. Due to socio-economic constraints as young people we spent all our time in these areas. Our presence as young black boys occupying space was seen as a threat by local shop keepers, restaurant owners, and the general public. The offences committed by a few were being projected on all young people of colour. The constant association of African youth with crime in the media was so powerful that it even convinced our parents and peers that we were all up to no good, with headlines like ‘African youth crime a concern’ and ‘Sudanese and Somali-born Victorians are about five times more likely to commit crimes’ (Oakes, D 2012).

As young people the reaction to fierce social, economic exclusion from the wider community and racialised policing was empowerment through activism. This activism took different shapes. Some of it was economic leveling through burglaries. Police brutality was met with smashing windows of police infrastructure. Racialised policing was challenged through legal avenues. Avoidance by running away at the sight of police was a culture that had developed. This happened because our experience told us that police contact would either end up in us being interrogated, harassed or our personal items being confiscated.

Police officers who act on their bias would tell us that our community was nothing but trouble and that we would live in the “dump of Flemington housing estates” forever. One officer whom was of European origin said “my community lived here before you guys but we worked hard and moved out but your community will stay here forever”. This officer was amongst the worst. He would routinely drive up onto the basketball court and confiscate any belongings that we had. He would ask for a receipt on the spot for any goods that you had be it a phone a music player and if you couldn’t provide one he would confiscate it stating that it was stolen. He would tell you to come into the police station (which was notorious for giving people the ‘phone book treatment’), with a receipt if you wanted to claim your item back. There was no reference number given for you to track your item.

Colonialism was the birth place of white supremacy. This is why police officers in Australia, a colonised country, that act on their bias and brutalise young men of colour, think it is appropriate. Their colonial mentality has told them that people of colour are inferior so it is ok to treat them inhumanely. These groups of officers need to be educated among other things, about other civilisations and their contributions to human development. There also needs to be adequate discipline and real consequences for officers who act on bias and who mistreat individuals.

African young men in the Flemington and North Melbourne areas are underrepresented in the crime statistics but are about 2.5 times more likely to have their stop and search recorded than what their population suggests. (Gordon, 2012)
3.2 Operation Molto

Around 2006 we began to hear stories of friends, particularly those who were more reserved and considered – being mistreated by police. These were young people who spent most of their time in the library studying or out training hard at their sports clubs. We heard about assaults on multiple of these young people on the same day. This made us question the motives of law enforcement. Everyone knew there had been trouble with police in the past, but nothing like this. In this period we had grown used to being stopped and sworn at, but we were mouthy too we would give it straight back. We knew there had been some robberies, but mostly it was people from outside Flemington coming in and giving us a bad name. We later found out that this “crack down” was called “Operation Molto”. During Operation Molto, plain clothed police officers patrolled the parks using racial taunts to stir up some action.

This heavy targeting of the African Australian young people was being defended as a means to reduce crime. In reality all it really did was harden and shape young people into delinquency and further marginalisation.

At the time we mainly blamed the robbers for the crackdown, not the police. This policing was different - it was indiscriminantly targeting of African young men. It was compounding, perpetrating violence, constant harassment, intimidation and denigration. It freaked us out because no one knew if one of us would be killed. There was a supportive social worker from the local council. With her encouragement, we began our legal fight.

1ST JANUARY 1983 - THE FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRES FORMED THE POLICE ISSUES WORKING GROUP TO INVESTIGATE COMPLAINTS AGAINST POLICE.
3.3 The Legal Challenge

Haile Michael & Ors v Konstantinidis, the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, the State of Victoria & Ors – Federal Court proceeding number VID 969 of 2010

Flemington Kensington Community Legal Centre (FKCLC) was our local community legal centre. FKCLC had a long history of undertaking police accountability work. In 2007, frustrated with all the dead-end complaints to Victoria Police, FKCLC began the “Bringing Human Rights in Police Practice” Project. The Project aimed to work through a number of interwoven legal, law reform and community development strategies. This project is now called the “Police Accountability Project”.

With the encouragement of Youth Worker Simone Perkin, sixteen of us told our stories of repeatedly being stopped, harassed and abused by members of Victoria Police to FKCLC. FKCLC compiled a complaint which detailed about 140 incidents of police mistreatment, and alleged that this comprised a systemic pattern of racial profiling, constituting a breach of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. The FKCLC lodged this with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). Nearly two full years passed in delays and fruitless conciliation. The commission had no power to decide whether or not discrimination occurred. It could only help us come to an agreement, which we could not reach.

With the realisation we couldn’t achieve our aims through the AHRC process, the FKCLC began to look at other platforms to seek justice for us. In the process the legal center received advice from Debbie Mortimer SC, now a Federal Court judge – suggesting that we had a racial discrimination case worth pursuing. FKCLC reached out to Peter Seidel and his team at Arnold Bloch Leibler. Seidel was the partner responsible for the practice’s public interest and native title work – he had represented the Yorta Yorta people in their protracted native title claim over land near the junction of the Murray and Goulburn Rivers.

We soon found out that court was risky business. For us it could have meant starting our careers hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt if we lost what was going to be a lengthy court process. Getting a protective costs order to which guarded us against financial ruin if we lost was the only option. That meant we would forgo our right to claim any compensation. We were also under pressure at home and within the community in general – many elders advised us against complaining. They were telling us that Australia wasn’t our country and that white people ruled it so there was no point challenging their system. They also were fearful of retribution stating that “the police are untouchables, so why are you being silly?”

The fact that some us were born here or had grown up in Australia, our view of the situation was different. For the most part we understood we had the right to stand up for ourselves – this was evident on the streets; our aggressive response to questioning had been welled up from a sense of injustice we felt from the way we were treated. We felt like this was our home, we knew no other place so we didn’t see why we should be treated any differently.

Finally, after working through many obstacles and keeping the hope that a Federal Court judgment would significantly impact and change policing in Victoria, on November 2010, seventeen of us lodged our case in the Federal Court. The application named several individual police officers, together with the chief commissioner and the State of Victoria. Our main remedies to racialised policing were the establishment of an independent complaints system, anti-racism training and receipting system to record stops and searches which we believed would hold police more accountable. The data from the receipting system would provide objective data about who is being stopped with the idea that proportions could then be extracted to monitor racialised policing.

As the legal battle took full swing new obstacles began to surface. We discovered that the judge didn’t have the jurisdiction to impose any reforms on Victoria Police if it found that they breached the Anti-Discrimination Act. This was a major blow for us because it felt like the system wouldn’t make the changes we thought were necessary and it also illustrated to us how powerful the police force was.

What our elders had said haunted us: “you don’t belong in this country, you can’t change their system and the police are untouchables”.

This went against everything we were indoctrinated to believe growing up in Australia. We were Australians, the police are there to serve us and the courts would protect us if our rights were violated. Several applicants decided to pull out of the case after hearing this news. The case became a grind, costing time off work, university and family. Considering all the other challenges going on in our lives we felt a sense of loss.

Finally, only six applicants remained. We stayed in partly because we had been in it for so long already, but also because there was a change in strategy: “if the courts couldn’t deliver justice then the people would”. The thinking was to use all the momentum and evidence collected during the long court process to spark a public campaign that would put a light on a dark part of the Victoria Police force. Gaining public support and scrutiny would force the leadership to address the issue.

Aboriginal people in Australia have been experiencing racial profiling since colonisation. One study found that search powers were used more frequently in the parts of NSW with large Aboriginal populations, and a higher proportion of them were unsuccessful. In Bourke and Brewarrina nine out of every ten searches were unsuccessful. (Chan & Cunneen, 2000, p.39)
3.4 Settlement

February 2013: more than four years since the complaint was first lodged with the Human Rights Commission, Victoria Police was eager to settle the case before it went to court. They agreed to a number of our demands so we agreed to settle the case. Even though Victoria police still denied the allegations - they agreed to hold twin inquiries, reporting by the end of the year into its cross-cultural training and the way officer’s deal with people they stop in the street. There was another unprecedented element: there would be no gag order which meant we were free to talk to the media, although only the two of us were willing and most of the documents from the case would be made public, including the experts’ statistics.

3.5 Post Settlement

In June 2013, Victoria Police invited community members to provide feedback on cross cultural training and ‘field contact’ policies and processes, asking individuals and organisations from across the state to make submissions. This process received more than 70 submissions, bringing a number of themes including communication issues between police members and the community, how field contacts are used, what constitutes ‘suspicious behavior’, perceived targeting of particular community groups and understanding of Victoria Police complaints process.

This consultation process also included a series of community forums to discuss these themes in greater detail. As well as commissioning independent reviews into the current cross-cultural training, field contact policies and processes, a ‘People’s Hearing on Racism and Police Violence’ was an event organised at a grassroots level by IMARA Advocacy, a youth-led lobby group on racial and religious profiling, offering space for the public to share testimony about the racism and violence of law enforcement. It was a chance to hear from witnesses and victims, their friends and family members, activists, organisers, and others. Giving a platform to individual and shared experiences of repression. From this event Victoria Police had received 68 submissions to its inquiries.

The outcomes from this process were used to help formulate recommendations for Victoria Police to improve their current policies and processes and enable them to serve the community better.

Victoria Police has produced a three year action plan to address these community concerns and drive change throughout the organisation. In December 2013 the report responding to the public enquiry “Equality is not the Same” was released by Victoria Police. It entailed a three year plan to review policies, stop and search receipting, cross cultural training and the development of the Priority Communities Division. In April 2015 a receipting trial was begun in two council areas, Dandenong and Moonee Valley. There are some significant issues with the receipting trial, including the fact that ethnicity will not be recorded. This will severally impact the usefulness of the data collected. The long journey continues.
Our policing experiences as young black men growing up in Flemington, made up of both over and under-policing, were normalised. Dominant voices validated over-policing by claiming high black crime rates and dismissed under-policing as ‘cultural misunderstanding’.

This report is important, because it shares the experiences of the marginalised in our society. They are generally young people who surveys or researchers cannot reach. The report aims to explore the policing experiences of marginalised young black men across Melbourne and assess both their legal and welfare support needs. It also touches on the role of service providers in supporting victims of police brutality. We were able to undertake this project with the combined assistance of the Ben Bodna Award, the Besen Family Foundation and the Assia-Altman Fund, for which we are very grateful.

We sought to better understand the experiences of young people in metropolitan Melbourne, two years after the Haile-Michael Federal Court settlement with Victoria Police. Were young people still being racially profiled in Melbourne? Had policing in Victoria changed at all since the Equality is Not The Same Report was launched by Victoria Police in December 2013 with the Chief Commissioner Ken Lay declaring that they had a ‘zero-tolerance’ to racial profiling? If it was still happening, what were young people doing about it and what were their legal and support needs?

Whilst racial profiling and abuse are often represented as mere tensions between minority communities and individual police members, the problem is in fact much deeper and more dangerous. Racialised policing reflects the attitudes of the State to minority communities in Australia, as in other countries. In fact, the mistreatment by police of racialised, minority communities is seen to exist in every western country. Death at the hands of police is the ultimate and tragic expression of this structural racism. This outcome is extreme, but not the only devastating impact of racist police mistreatment and abuse.

Research has consistently highlighted the problematic nature of relations between police and young people. Interactions between police and young people often breed conflict and tension, with high levels of anger, fear and mistrust on both sides (Crime and Misconduct Commission Queensland, 2009; White, 1997; Liederbach, 2007). As one of our project participants stated:

“I always try to avoid them I don’t look them in the eye. I don’t want to acknowledge them because they don’t do their job properly.” (research participant)

From the perspective of young people, there are perceptions of both over-policing in public spaces and under-policing in cases of victimisation. Perceptions of racism, intimidation and violence have also been identified. Mutually negative perceptions and interactions between police and young people can result in adverse outcomes for both parties. The negative perceptions held by young people may lead to dissatisfaction with police as well as a lack of confidence in the police more generally. Several studies investigating public attitudes towards police support this view and have shown that, in comparison with older people, young people tend to be more dissatisfied with police and have lower assessments of police competency (Crime and Misconduct Commission Queensland, 2009; Borrero, 2001; Brown & Benedict, 2002).
4.1 Young people

Ten young men were interviewed for this project. One young woman was interviewed to test the questions but it failed to attain the rich stories that we know exist. As young men, we did not feel well positioned to speak to young women about their experiences. We were also very limited in the scope of this project, which was funded for only a three-month period and for which we were employed only part-time. We acknowledge that women’s, including young women’s voices have been largely missing within the academic and community-based research in Victoria about racialised policing. Whilst we were not able to address that gap in this project, we believe it is of great importance that the voices of young women of colour are heard and centred in these conversations and hope to build our support for projects and approaches that enable that.

Young men we spoke to were selected based on their knowledge and experience of the issues as well as the locality in which they live. We wanted to get the breadth and depth of racialised policing experiences across Melbourne.

Two ‘hotspots’ of racialised policing have been identified through previous research (Dolic 2011; Smith & Reside 2010) as well as the current project. These identified hotspots illustrated in Figure 1 included Melbourne’s inner Western and South Eastern Suburbs and the interviews were divided roughly in half between these two broad areas. The main suburbs that the interviewees came from were Flemington, Sunshine, Noble park and Dandenong. All young men we spoke to are of refugee background, predominately from the African continent, with various religious beliefs. The participant’s occupations varied - but were limited to blue collar jobs. Some of the young men are also well-respected community leaders.

All of the research participants were from low socio-economic backgrounds. For many young men, speaking with us was the first time that they had shared their personal stories of policing issues with anybody. This was because we had similar experiences and that established a sense of comradery and trust. Young people do not feel comfortable sharing these deeply personal experiences with a “stranger” whom might not believe their story or do anything to help. It is a huge risk for young people to open up and share their stories with service providers. That risk for many is not worth taking as service providers do not seem to know what to do when it is the police that are misbehaving.

4.1.1 Young people’s experiences of policing.

Coming in to this project with experiences of racialised policing and a community battle for justice, we thought that we understood the issue and the extent to which brutality is normalised. We were shocked at the extent to which these views were entrenched. Experiences of racialised policing were spoken about as if they were a daily routine that for some was as common as being asked to pay for goods at a store.

Why do young people feel they are treated differently due to their race, perceived race or ethnicity?
- Disproportionate level of stops and searches (Gordon 2012).
- How they see others being treated by police – this tends to be more polite, whereas the questioning of black young men feels more like an interrogation. This feels like the police are just waiting for young people to crack and confess.
- Under-policing: when people of colour report crimes or seek assistance, they are either not taken seriously or told their matter is not urgent/important.
4.1.2 ‘Over-policing’

Interviewing the young people we found that their police encounters were mainly in public spaces whilst they were doing everyday activities such as catching public transport, walking in public or driving. The approach of police officers during these encounters was described as being threatening in nature and held an underlying assumption of guilt. This sometimes resulted in young people being unlawfully assaulted or embarrassed in public through unnecessary searches or questioning. The young people expressed their frustration at the continuous harassment and assumption of guilt during their policing encounters. These assumptions lead to young men reporting weekly contact with the police. Some expressed the embarrassment they are put through when stopped and searched publicly. For others, it is the way police framed questions targeting them that made them feel like they are being publicly interrogated, as this is done before the public using a series of interrogative questions.

It was a common feeling within young African men that this would not happen with their peers from Anglo backgrounds, that those peers don’t experience the same level of attention in public spaces as they are not seen as a threat to society. These young men also observed that even when those peers are in contact with police, the same assumptions of guilt are not made. These claims echo a report by the Crime and Misconduct Commission Queensland (2009) which suggests that ethnic young men are more likely to experience negative police contact because they are more visible and therefore are perceived as being more of a threat to society.

When police approach those of Anglo backgrounds, they genuinely ask questions related to policing – that is, the questions are open ended - which allows space for an explanation. Young black men reported heavy handed policing whilst they were doing mundane activities such as walking down a busy street or catching public transport. As one of our research participants put forward:

“I would be stopped [and] asked what I was doing and [where] I was going for nothing. Sometimes they call you names when they feel like it.”

4.1.3 ‘Under policing’

Examples of under policing are common not only amongst young men but the CALD community in general. They range from police refusing to respond adequately to community concerns to refusing to investigate and apprehend offenders. Members of the community have also reported being asked their ethnicity when making an emergency call and have experienced slower responses to their enquiries when the officer has identified their ethnic background.

Other stories captured by this project include a mother who had to attend the police station 3 times and have the presence of her community leaders for a police officer to place a missing persons report for her teenage son whom a week later was found dead by police. Instead of attending the family house to deliver the tragic news to his mother, an officer called her into the police station - which is not the general practice.

One of the research participants shares an encounter he had with police. He tells us that one evening, while walking to find a taxi to go home, he was stopped by two police officers who asked where he was going and what he was doing there.

“I told them I was going home then they asked me for ID” he adds. At which point he said he didn’t have any ID but stated that he only has a healthcare card.

As he reached into his pocket for his healthcare card, he was hit to the ground by police.

“I don’t remember what happened after that, but when I woke up I just saw blood and that one of my front teeth had been knocked out”.

This young man says what is happening here is a lack of care by those who are meant to be our protectors.
Have you or anyone you know had much contact with police?
A majority of young people had experienced racial profiling and the few who hadn’t had a story of someone they know to tell.

How often do you have contact with police?
Half experienced it on a weekly basis. Most felt like they were being picked on. They stopped activities like going out to town to avoid police contact. The interactions varied in severity, some have had minimal contact but it had been a traumatic experience.

Can you describe the type of contact with police? Is it normal/usual?
The way police approach young black males is intimidating and begins in a negative confrontation. They provoke young people in order to have their way by using racial slurs or threatening language or physical assault. In all the contacts the location was in public spaces. There was one person who said that he has had some good experiences. Both examples of under and over policing were reported by young people.

Why do you think you are policed like this?
Because we are different and police are biased. Power tripping simply because they can and they know that they can get away with it because young people don’t have as much power.

Who have you told about it?
Majority said “nobody”. The few who said yes said they contacted friends and legal firms. There was only one person who succeeded in getting support and that was through FKCLC.

What have you done/what can you do?
Majority said they can’t do anything about it due to financial challenges. The few who contacted legal aid said they would not be able to support them because they are not on their priority list.

Why haven’t you done anything about it?
Lack of legal support and faith in the legal system to deliver justice for them. The fear of police retribution.

How does the contact with police make you feel?
Weak, unwelcome in Australia, unworthy, insecure, not having the right to use public space.

How do you stay safe?
Avoidance is the main strategy but this has many social impacts on young people’s lives and may lead to social isolation as they avoid going to clubs and other social scenes. Other strategies include being in big groups.

Who is supporting you about this? Community/family/agencies?
Most young people feel like they have nobody to go to if they have police issues.

How important is this issue to you? In terms of other issues in your life?
For majority it is important but because of the hopelessness it’s not on the priorities list in young people’s lives. In one case it was the most important thing as they believed the whole country was founded on white supremacy.

How hopeful do you feel about changing these issues for yourself or others? Why?
Some are hopeful because they are seeing this issue in the media and that it will change for generations to come. Others are not hopeful.

What are your ideas for change?
Anti-racism education and training for both the general community and law enforcement agencies. Some also say we need a police force that reflects Victoria’s multicultural society.

How likely are you to complain?
Majority say that they might complain and the rest are evenly split between not complaining and definitely complaining.
The impact of negative policing experiences on young people is profound. Developmentally they are at a stage where they are looking for their place in society; possibly rebelling against the values instilled in them by their parents and are heavily influenced by their peers and the media. In some ways it is also the most vulnerable stage in their life as they are most exposed to the world’s influences through popular culture and other mechanisms.

The main stereotypical black male narratives that young men are continuously exposed to are associated with criminality and gangs. When one is continually treated as such they may unconsciously begin to accept that stereotype as their destiny and reality. Combine this with a lack of positive mentors and growing up in public housing where you have greater access to drugs and dealers than you do to books and professionals. The system has set up these young boys & men for a life associated with crime and dependency – it is amazing that so many young men of colour resist or avoid that kind of life.

The police’s abuse of their power pushes young men further on to the margins of society where the young men feel a reduced sense of belonging, suffer mental health issues and a longing for a place where they are valued. This creates a world of vulnerability and social isolation.

“…everybody that saw what was happening just kept walking past because racism is not their business. Even though it should be everybody’s business.” (research participant)

Processes of criminalisation trap young people of colour into a world that they probably never imagined they would be in. In terms of numbers young African males in Flemington and North Melbourne are still underrepresented in the crime statistics and over represented by about 2.5 times in stops and searches (Gordon, 2012). The rate of imprisonment is definitely on the rise and many young men will be trapped in that vicious cycle. Racialised policing also results in reduced confidence in policing and in turn a reduction in reporting crimes or cooperation with police.

Research shows a strong and consistent relationships between racial discrimination and a range of detrimental health outcomes such as low self-esteem, reduced resilience, increased behaviour problems and lower levels of wellbeing. (Priest et al, 2013)

**1ST NOVEMBER 2010 - FEDERAL COURT CASE**

The case involved claims about assaults, excessive use of force and an assault in detention by six applicants of African descent.

**SNAPSHOT: RACIAL PROFILING IN THE U.S.**

- African-Americans comprise 13% of the U.S. population and 14% of the monthly drug users, but 37% of the people arrested for drug-related offenses in America (Quigley, 2011).
- Studies show that police are more likely to pull over and frisk blacks or Latinos than whites. In New York City, 80% of the stops made were blacks and Latinos, and 85% of those people were frisked, compared to a mere 8% of the white people stopped (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011).
- In 2009 African-Americans are 21% more likely than whites to receive mandatory minimum sentences and 20% more likely to be sentenced to prison than white drug defendants (Kansai, 2005).
- In 2010, the U.S. Sentencing Commission reported that African Americans receive 10% longer sentences than whites through the federal system for the same crimes (Quigley, 2011).
- After being arrested, African-Americans are 33% more likely than whites to be detained while facing a felony trial in New York (Quigley, 2011).

*There is a lot of effective activism and research that has happened in the U.S. We present these statistics to draw the links between local and international experience and to make the case for research and data collection that would provide these kinds of statistics in the Victorian context.
Access to justice

Here we explore the accessibility of the justice system to the young men. The barriers are multi-dimensional. Legal language and structure is sophisticated, making it difficult to understand for the average person. If you don’t understand the law how can you obey it or assert your rights?

A lawyer becomes of crucial importance in this system. The financial barrier for young men from lower socio-economic backgrounds means that they cannot afford to pay for representation. The social support mechanisms in place to provide them access to legal representation due to funding shortages will only support a limited number of clients. Currently there is the understanding that they only support instances where the young person pleads guilty. So the options for them are limited to plead guilty or face court by yourself. One of our research participants explained how:

“In my case I contacted 260 legal firms to try and get pro bono legal support. The quotes were too expensive for me to pay. Legal aid told me that I would have to plead guilty for them to help me. Why would I plead guilty to something I didn’t do? The only legal centre that would help was the Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre.”

As a result the legal systems failure to cater to people from low socio economic backgrounds in a way plays a part in the criminalisation of this part of society. Most of the respondents stated that there is no accessibility to lawyers who could support them with their negative policing experiences. The ones who knew of legal centers that could support stated that they were overwhelmed with caseloads.

Across Victoria there aren’t many legal centres that cater for police accountability clients which create that stress on legal centers that do. Many of the young men expressed their frustrations at the lack of accessibility they had to the justice system. They also felt the police complaints process was a waste of time due to the track record it has of returning claims made as “unsubstantiated” and the conflict of interest that occurs when the investigating officer knows the officer who is being complained about.

Other barriers that prevent young men of color from pursuing justice for crimes committed against them by officers of the law include false charges, employment, family and education. Families from CALD communities generally fear challenging the system and authority especially the police. A research participant described his view that:

“It’s a waste of time, you won’t get anywhere and the police will hassle you.”

False charges are generally laid by police officers as way of silencing victims whom might want to seek a remedy for the damages they have experienced. For some young men the level of understanding and faith in the system plays an important role in them forming their decision to act or otherwise on wrongs they have experienced. Another critical factor in their decision making is whether it will impact current or future employment opportunities. The fear is that losing a legal challenge might result in other charges being laid on them and getting a criminal record would really limit their employment and other life opportunities. As one research participant expressed:

“[I don’t complain] because I am black and they know I don’t have the money to do anything about it.”
4.1.6 Hopes for the future

Young people are becoming more optimistic because of the public conversations both locally and internationally that are beginning to shed light on such a taboo topic. This topic is taboo because it is about something very deep and about people’s identity; it tends to polarise people almost instantaneously. But public conversations are building people’s confidence in the system and hopes of successful integration. Despite the increase in optimism, the majority of young people still feel that the system will not change in the near future. Their hopes are that things will improve in the next couple of generations, for their children and their children’s children. As a research participant told us:

“Recently I have been seeing this issue on the media, that always gives you hope because the public just to talking about it is a good start.”

Since the Haile-Michael Federal court case there has been a more balanced media coverage of policing of African young men – but misrepresentation is still a problem. Key issues continue to be: over reporting on crimes committed by Africans; reporting which continent a person came from as a descriptor which isn’t a proper descriptor as Africans come in all shades and shapes. Even when it wasn’t necessary to describe a person’s characteristic their African-ness was being used to describe them whilst white people were being referred to by the suburb that they live in.

Our lack of faith, and that of the young men we spoke to, rests in the suspicion of the intentions of the founders of the current system. It is a system that privileges whiteness and those with resources and ‘power’. Many believe that until the issues of Indigenous sovereignty and systemic racism are resolved, there isn’t much hope for the newly arrived and communities of colour. Many young men stated that if there were cases where people-powered change occurred, then that would give them more hope because it would be clear that the system responds to societies concerns. The combination of Police and mainstream media’s overreporting of crimes allegedly committed by Africans has the effect of alienating the African communities, desensitising the public to racialised policing and crimes committed on Africans. It also creates a sense of fear and bias (unconscious or otherwise) towards African males in particular. As research participants explained:

“White people don’t see black people as their own. I have also become aware that I am being stared at and it makes me feel insecure. That fear also attracts bad stuff happening.”

“I really don’t know how you can stay safe from them.”

Most of the young men we spoke to stated that education is the key to change. In particular, anti-racism training for police, government and in our education institutions. The police force needs to reflect the society in which it is policing so more African police are required to help change the policing culture for this to be effective strong policies and command support is required. Young men also said that CALD community members need to be educated about their rights as well as their responsibilities as citizens so that they can exercise their democratic rights meaningfully. This was expressed by one of our research participants who stated:

“I have seen some of the things you guys are doing and yeah that gives me hope things might change if not for me maybe for my kid.”

Many young people suggested that if the police complaints process was more effective that they would be likely to complain. Half the respondents said they wouldn’t complain because they don’t see any positive outcomes for themselves through complaining and the others cite the lengthy complaints process was a major deterrent. The young people who said they would complain, knowing that the complaints process wasn’t functional, hoped that their case would contribute to the total number of complaints about policing and would trigger a debate about the complaints process and then a solution found to fix the broken system.
4.2 Service providers

Ten community sector organisations were interviewed to gain insight to their understanding of racialised policing and its imprint on their service delivery.

All of the service providers interviewed worked with youth directly but the organisations varied both in scale and services provided. Their service delivery offerings varied from health education to youth work. Their catchment areas were mainly in metropolitan Melbourne and their sizes varied from small to medium sized organisations.

4.2.1 Workers experiences of supporting clients with policing issues.

Every single one of the interviewees said they know a young person of colour that is experiencing policing issues or has told them about somebody who is experiencing those issues.

Workers also noted that young black men expressed their frustration at being targeted by police. The majority of service providers said they were not in a position to qualify those narratives and the broader conclusions of racialised policing, but they were concerned by those strong sentiments and felt this was a space that required more enquiry, research and a sectorial response.

Many also noted that it is not part of their job to handle policing issues. They see it as a legal issue that needs to be addressed through legal supports.

Some workers said racialised policing is a grey area in which they had no clear direction. All workers commented on the lack of knowledge CALD communities have around their rights and dealing with the criminal justice system and that this severely limits minority communities ability to defend charges and to gain remedies for crimes committed against them. As one service provider argued:

“The young people don’t know what to do [and] we don’t know what to do about it so we refer to FKCLC.”

In short, young people routinely disclosed stories of racialised policing to community workers whom they trusted. Almost universally, those workers were not equipped, mandated or skilled enough to do anything about those disclosures.
4.2.2 Understanding of Racialised Policing

When workers were asked about their understanding of racialised policing, most responses were limited to noting that it included treating people differently based on their race. The criminalising effects or concepts of under or over-policing were not mentioned. However, after defining racial profiling during the interview, all service providers stated that their clients were experiencing racialised policing.

It seemed to be this process of defining racial profiling that led interviewees to recognising the impact that race has played in the way their clients are policed. They also admitted that it is not an issue that they have looked into deeply besides the anecdotal evidence.

Each interviewee believed that racial profiling is not an issue that is recognized openly within the sector.

Workers felt that more inquiry and research is required for it to receive wider acceptance within the sector. This highlights racial profiling from just an experience that people of colour have to an issue that is recognized across sectors and is publicly being debated.

4.2.3 How workers are addressing the issue

Most workers stated that responding to racial profiling wasn’t a stated part of their role so they are not working on this issue. Some workers said they referred clients to legal service providers and that a majority of their clients didn’t want to make formal complaints because it was such a lengthy and ineffective process. Some felt that the high turnover of workers meant that a strong relationship that would allow the young person to reveal such a sensitive issue wasn’t being built. Highlighting that this issue may not be on workers radar’s because it is under reported and not well understood. Some also cited that they didn’t know where to refer young people. There was one group that worked on this issue directly and addressed it through a social media presence and advocacy.

4.2.4 Hopes for the future

In response to questions centered on ways to progress the issue of racial profiling, a number of remedies where suggested by workers. They varied from systemic to organisational changes. The most popular suggestion was increased cross cultural and anti-racism training for all public institutions such as Victoria Police. The next most popular response was to increase funding for social security and Legal Aid to reduce criminalisation of the most vulnerable members of the community. Workers also cited that the most direct impact that could be made was through legal training around police powers, complaints process and racial profiling case studies for community sector workers. On a sectorial level, they stated that a better framework needed to be built to support the legal sector to achieve improved justice outcomes for young people impacted by racial profiling.
**SNAPSHOT:** A SUMMARY OF THE RESPONSES OF WORKERS TO OUR QUESTIONS.

**What is the role of your agency?**
All were community sector service providers. There was one volunteer run police watchdog group.

**How would you describe the work you do?**
All provide social services via several avenues from health, education to arts. There was one advocacy organization interviewed that created awareness about racial profiling.

**What types of policing experiences do you work with?**
Majority of contact is negative for a number of reasons.
- Police brutality, unlawful stop searches & racial profiling.
- CALD community lack of understanding of the law which also results in them not defending charges (guilty plea to get Legal Aid support). Also not addressing issues before they become a major problem and legal proceedings begin (fines). Complicated terminology and processes.
- Mistrust.

**What’s your understanding/definition of racially discriminative policing?**
Majority of respondents defined racially discriminative policing as treating people differently on the basis of their race.

**What’s your perspective on racially discriminative policing?**
Majority of respondents said that it needs to change and the process is further enquiry and cultural competency education of the Police force.

**Are your clients experiencing racialised policing?**
Most said yes and the ones that didn’t noted that their clients felt targeted.

**What are the service gaps?**
Government tends to cut legal aid funding but increase number of prisons. Majority of service providers indicated lack of resources and high staff turnover as the primary reasons for the service gaps that exist. The service gaps include quality affordable legal representation, community workers understanding and faith in Victoria police’s complaints process. Places that can take on legal referrals. Also some of the organisations get their funding and referrals through Victoria police so they a might have conflict of interest when it comes to addressing police brutality. Some have suggested under policing as a gap within Victoria Polices service delivery. Also cross-cultural competency training for field police officers as a gap. Racial Profiling is not mentioned in community organisation’s role and function. So workers feel like it’s not their job to address the issue or they feel restricted by their organisation.

**What are the barriers?**
Funding, lack of networks and knowledge of the complaints process. Young people might experience further targeting. Dysfunctional complaints process that lacks accountability and independence. Racist society. Health and wellbeing issues of young people.

**What do you think needs to happen?**
Society needs to change first. Community needs to be educated about the law during the settlement process. A clear report that highlights the needs along with solutions to racial profiling to challenge the community sector to do more. Information needs to be disseminated from executive to grass roots level. Education for police to change their culture. Positive legal outcomes of racial profiling cases need to be articulated and promoted.

**What is your capacity to do this work/take on more?**
Majority said it wasn’t their job to address it but where happy to play a supporting role outside their job.

**What do you need in terms of training?**
Legal and complaints process education along with case studies.
Conclusion

This project emerged in response to stories we had been hearing about continuing racial profiling by police. We hoped to build the knowledge base of the extent of racial profiling and its impacts. This project builds on a long history of community resistance and resilience. The project was also undertaken in the context of increased awareness and international media surrounding the deadly effects of racialised policing in light of recent events in the U.S.

Despite the recent changes in the Victorian context, particularly in the aftermath of the Haile Michael case, our research demonstrates that significant issues of racial profiling, over-policing and under-policing persist for young people of colour in Melbourne. We have also found that the community sector remains relatively ill-equipped to deal with the impacts of racialised policing on their client base.

We were saddened to hear stories from young people of colour of pain, loss, violence and harassment as a result of policing. We were further taken back by how normalised the practice of racialised policing was and how it appears to be widely accepted in the community. Some young black men had reported their experiences of racialised policing to service providers, only to find the workers were not mandated or equipped to handle those cases. These young people were conscious of the system that placed them in difficult socio economic situations with minimal alternatives to escape their predicament/ police harassment or abuse.

The situation of young people of colour experiencing racialised policing are compounded by a complex legal system which gives young people two options: either plead guilty and minimise the sentence or face a tougher sentence by attending court alone. Young people reported a clear lack of legal support and a targeted effort by policing authorities to prevent any action being taken against them. More resources need to be placed into Legal Aid and centers to cope with the caseloads.

The support required within the community sector is multi-faceted. Community development workers trusted by young people, need significant training about racial profiling, its impacts and the law. Workers also need support from within their own organisations to undertake this kind of support. Community development and youth workers often play a crucial intermediary role between the lawyers and marginalised young people.

More longitudinal research needs to be conducted in Australia to provide critical information about the practice of racial profiling and its impact on individuals, groups and society as a whole. International practices that have been successful in reducing or eliminating this oppressive process need to be investigated. Government also needs to intervene by making the police force more accountable through establishing an independent body that handles complaints about policing. It should also invest in programs that address the multiple socio-economic challenges that minority community’s face and racism at large. It seems counterproductive to be spending millions of dollars to grow the prison industrial complex when investing a fraction of that money could turn those lives into happy productive connected people. These initiatives need to be led by the young people of colour who are most impacted by these processes.
Further Resources

The following is a list of groups and organisations that are working on Racial Profiling either in advocacy or case work capacity.

**Victoria**

Ethnic Communities Council in Victoria  
http://eccv.org.au/

Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre – Police Accountability Project  

IMARA Advocacy  
http://www.imarayouth.org/

Indigenous Social Justice Association  
http://www.isja-msg.com/

Victorian Aboriginal Advancement League

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service  
http://vals.org.au/

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission  

Warriors for Aboriginal Resistance  
https://www.facebook.com/WARcollective

Youth law  
http://youthlaw.asn.au/

**Australia**

Australian Human Rights Commission  

Redfern Legal Centre  

**America**

Black Brunch

Black lives Matter  
http://blacklivesmatter.com/

CopWatch  
http://www.copwatch.org/

Critical Resistance  
http://criticalresistance.org/

Hands up United  
http://www.handsupunited.org/
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