

# UBUNTU Guidelines

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The University of Melbourne  
In partnership with AAFRO and Afri-Aus Care Inc.



**Afri-Aus Care Inc.**  
Building Bridges and Forging Community



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We acknowledge the Wurundjeri and Bunurong/BoonWurrung of the Kulin Nation as the sovereign First Peoples and custodians of these lands, which they have cared for over thousands of generations, and where we now make our homes, do our work, and raise our families. We pay respect to Elders, past and present, who carry the wisdom of their ancestors through the present and into our shared futures.

*“We belong in a bundle of life. And so, we say in our part of the world: ‘A person is a person through other persons’ ... ‘I am human because I belong, I participate, I share’, and harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us ... the greatest good.”*

**– Desmond Tutu**

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## CONTENTS

Working in an UBUNTU Way.....	1
Introduction to the UBUNTU Guidelines.....	1
Background to the Guidelines.....	1
Who are these Guidelines for?.....	2
What are these Guidelines for? .....	3
Practice principles.....	4
• Safety .....	4
• Coming together .....	4
• Connectedness.....	4
• Circle .....	4
• Storytelling.....	4
• Healing .....	4
• Empowerment .....	4
• Collaboration.....	4
• Social solidarity .....	4
• UBUNTU leadership .....	4
Safety.....	5
What does it mean to create safety? .....	5
What does safety look like in practice?.....	5
Coming together .....	7
What does it mean to come together? .....	7
What does coming together look like in practice?.....	7
Connectedness.....	9
What does it mean to be connected? .....	9
What does connectedness look like in practice? .....	9
CASE STUDY: Safety – Coming together – Connectedness.....	11
Circle .....	12
What does the circle mean? .....	12

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What does the circle look like in practice?.....	12
Storytelling.....	14
What does storytelling involve?.....	14
What does storytelling look like in practice? .....	14
Healing.....	16
What does healing involve? .....	16
What does healing look like in practice?.....	16
CASE STUDY: Circle – Storytelling – Healing .....	17
Empowerment .....	19
What does it mean to empower people?.....	19
What does empowerment look like in practice?.....	19
Collaboration .....	21
What does it mean to work in collaboration? .....	21
What does collaboration look like in practice? .....	21
Social solidarity .....	24
What does it mean to create social solidarity? .....	24
What does social solidarity look like in practice?.....	24
CASE STUDY: Empowerment – Collaboration – Social solidarity .....	25
UBUNTU leadership .....	26
What does <i>UBUNTU</i> leadership mean and why is it important?.....	26
What does <i>UBUNTU</i> leadership look like in practice?.....	26
Please refer to the UBUNTU Practice Toolkit: .....	28
References .....	28

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# Working in an UBUNTU Way

## Introduction to the UBUNTU Guidelines

Despite a great deal of diversity among and between African people and communities in Australia, a strong communal thread ties these many cultures together. In many parts of Africa, this tradition is associated with the philosophy of *ubuntu*, a Nguni Bantu word for ‘humanness’<sup>1</sup>. *Ubuntu* is based on principles of common humanity, interconnectedness and relationality. *Ubuntu* is commonly expressed in the saying: ‘I am because we are’.

*Ubuntu*, according to Desmond Tutu<sup>2</sup>, is difficult to describe in English words but may be understood as the African sense that individuals and groups form their identities in relation to each other. While this distinction echoes Indigenous understandings of relationality, it is different from ‘Western’ conceptions of self and others, which tend to emphasise individualism over communitarianism.

There are different words for *ubuntu* in different languages. Most importantly *ubuntu* highlights that, as humans sharing one planet, we have much to learn together. These guidelines offer a way to learn – from our African Australian brothers and sisters – about an *ubuntu* way of working to support others in our community.

These Guidelines have been developed through a collaborative approach to understanding what *ubuntu* looks and feels like in practice. This collaboration involved researchers at the University of Melbourne capturing the key elements of the work of two African Australian community-based or ‘grassroots’ organisations working in Melbourne, Victoria: [AAFRO](#) (which stands for Australian African Foundation for Retention and Opportunity) in the West and [Afri-Aus Care](#) in the South-East. Both organisations frame their work in terms of UBUNTU.\*.

## Background to the Guidelines

These UBUNTU Guidelines were developed as a result of the *Empowering African Mothers Project: Ubuntu in Practice*, a partnership between the University of Melbourne and [AAFRO](#) and [Afri-Aus Care](#), and a project funded (in 2020-2021) by the Community Crime Prevention Unit of the Victorian Government’s Department of Justice and Community Safety.

The aim of this project, ‘the UBUNTU project’, was to identify the key elements of an UBUNTU way of working, by observing and documenting the practices of AAFRO and Afri-Aus Care in supporting African Australian mothers facing a range of post-settlement challenges.

The UBUNTU project is premised on the belief that empowering an African Australian mother empowers her family and community. An UBUNTU way of working thus offers a wholistic way of

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supporting families and communities to address a wide range of issues, including those faced by children and young people. Using this approach, in 2021, AAFRO and Afri-Aus Care supported more than 30 African Australian mothers through one-on-one individual and family support, group activities and advocacy.

Mothers were supported to overcome issues such as social isolation and housing insecurity, and to access English language skills, computer literacy, legal and financial advice, and pathways to employment. Difficult subjects such as mental illness – taboo in many African Australian communities – were addressed with care and cultural sensitivity. Mothers were supported to build healthy family relationships and engage effectively with their children, including those at risk of involvement with the justice system, using a practical UBUNTU approach.

Both AAFRO and Afri-Aus Care have established their own culturally responsive ways of working to support African Australian young people, families and communities in Victoria. While their approaches are different, they share as a strong philosophical foundation in UBUNTU, shaped by African cultural values and traditions.

### **So, what does it mean to work in an UBUNTU way?**

This is the question we started with in developing these Guidelines (and the UBUNTU Practice Toolkit that goes with them). By talking to AAFRO and Afri-Aus Care workers and volunteers, mothers participating in the UBUNTU project, and other individuals who have experienced this UBUNTU approach, the research team was able to identify the essential elements of working in an UBUNTU way. We have distilled these into the ten principles in these UBUNTU Guidelines.

## **Who are these Guidelines for?**

We offer these UBUNTU Guidelines for individuals, practitioners, community groups, service providers and organisations – anyone interested in reflecting on, learning about, and implementing the principles in their practice – so that others can benefit from an UBUNTU way of working.

It is important to note that, while the philosophy of UBUNTU is universal, the practice of UBUNTU is fluid and context dependent. The practice principles outlined below are based on African cultural values and concepts applied in an Australian context. *Working in an UBUNTU way* refers to working to support culturally and linguistically diverse groups in Australia, including but not limited to African Australians. The practice examples illustrate the need for us all to be *flexible, adaptable, creative, forgiving, and responsive* to the individuals, families and communities we are working with.

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\* We use UBUNTU in capital letters to identify the *UBUNTU way of working*, which is at the heart of the UBUNTU Guidelines and the accompanying UBUNTU Toolkit.

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## What are these Guidelines for?

These UBUNTU Guidelines outline **ten principles that we have identified as the essential elements for working in an UBUNTU way**. We expand on these principles – with further case studies, practice examples, activities and resources – in the accompanying UBUNTU Practice Toolkit. For those seeking to understand more about the philosophical, historical and political underpinnings of UBUNTU, a reading list is provided at the end of the Toolkit.

In these Guidelines we explain each of the ten principles, how they relate to each other, and we provide examples of what they look like in practice. We identify potential pitfalls that can arise when trying to work in an UBUNTU way, and we suggest possible solutions to mitigate these issues.

Our examples are based on the practices of two African Australian community-based organisations, AAFRO and Afri-Aus Care, who each have their own UBUNTU way of working. The case studies and practice examples presented, therefore, are not prescriptive. They are used to illustrate different UBUNTU ways of working, and to inspire you to think about how you can implement an UBUNTU way of working in your own practice.

Working in an UBUNTU way is **a culturally responsive way of working** with African Australians. But, because UBUNTU means ‘humanness’, and emphasises common humanity, it is also a way of working that can be appropriate, sensitive and receptive to the cultural needs of any and all people, groups and communities.

Working in an UBUNTU way is about **how we think, feel and act towards ourselves and others**, including people we work with. We expand on these thinking, feeling and acting (doing) aspects in the UBUNTU Toolkit, which accompanies and complements these Guidelines.

*“Ubuntu means humanity and it means acting in a way that is kind, that is humanitarian, and that involves listening, deep listening. ... acting in a way that is humane, that is kind, that is receptive, not just to ourselves but to one another.”*

– John Lockley<sup>3</sup>

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# Practice principles

*Ten principles for working in an UBUNTU way*



**Safety**



**Coming together**



**Connectedness**



**Circle**



**Storytelling**



**Healing**



**Empowerment**



**Collaboration**



**Social solidarity**



**UBUNTU leadership**





## **What does it mean to create safety?**

- Safety means creating a safe and comfortable physical environment, a place of ease, a 'home away from home'.
- Safety means creating an emotionally, psychologically and culturally safe space, with no judgment, where each person feels they can be who they are.
- A place of active and respectful listening.
- A place where we are able to talk about 'heavy topics', without feeling judged or misunderstood.
- Safety is a feeling of trust and belonging.
- Recognition and acknowledgment of each person's value as a human being.

## **What does safety look like in practice?**

### *Afri-Aus Care Case Study*

#### An Insecure Environment

In her early teens Agnes began dating a boy who like her, had migrated from Africa to Australia when he was only a child. The only culture the couple knew was that of Australia and to them, the tribal resentment common in their countries of birth was a foreign idea and one that did not cross their minds. The same could not be said for Agnes' family, who had clear memories of their African homeland and still held on to such tribal resentments.

Upon hearing of Agnes' boyfriend, these resentments began to surface in Agnes' brother, Amari, and her mother, Ada. Amari and Ada forbid Agnes from seeing her boyfriend, and while she agreed to these terms, she decided to continue the relationship in secret. However, this secret was soon uncovered when a close friend of Agnes ousted her secret relationship to Amari and Ada due to a sense of loyalty she felt to her tribe.

Amari was furious at Agnes for continuing the relationship and when faced with her defiance he beat her. Ada gave Agnes no sympathy and cursed her for bringing shame on their family through

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the inter-tribal relationship. Amari demand she leave the family home and Ada supported this assertion.

### What Happened Next

Abandoned by her family, Agnes turned to her friends for support. The strict traditional African values that had led to Agnes being evicted were common within the African community and it was easy to find others who had similar experiences. However, the solutions that they offered her mainly came in a bottle and it was not long before drinking wine and smoking marijuana became a feature of her daily ritual. Agnes was young and while her lived experiences were already more than many will ever face, her naivety made substance misuse an all too alluring fix for her unresolved traumas. This belief was only strengthened in the absence of older family members who could guide her through such falsehoods.

Sometime after her eviction, Agnes and her friends were on a night out. Such outings were common for Agnes who enjoyed the chance to drink and forgot the pain her family caused. However, the night took a turn when Agnes' friends got into a fight with girls they had met out. Agnes came to her friend's defense but soon after the police arrived. Agnes was arrested and remanded in custody for 3 months.

### Rehabilitation through Security

Agnes connected with Afri-Aus Care while in remand and her release from remand was accompanied by a promise that Afri-Aus Care would support her post-release rehabilitation. Afri-Aus Care, in partnership with similar organisations, provided Agnes with food, material, and accommodation aid and in doing so ensured she had the safety necessary to facilitate her reintegration.

Afri-Aus Care staff contacted Ada shortly after their first discussion with Agnes. The call was intended to reconnect Agnes with her mother but Ada was firm in the rejection of her daughter, telling Afri-Aus Care staff that "Agnes was a disgrace to the family and community and that [she] did not want [her] other children to end up like Agnes".

Afri-Aus Care staff continued to speak with Ada while simultaneously supporting Agnes to overcome the traumas she had endured. In time, Ada agreed to speak with Agnes and actively engage with what Agnes had to say. Agnes shared her story with Ada by employing the UBUNTU method of storytelling (discussed below). This enabled Ada to empathize with her daughter and look past the tribal prejudices that had clouded her judgement to begin with. The pair were reunited shortly after the call.

Agnes has gone on to find secure employment and is currently completing her post-secondary school studies. Her journey to this point has been far from easy, but by receiving physical and emotional security, Agnes was able to reconnect with her family and wider community.



# Coming together

## What does it mean to come together?

- Coming together is about collectivity, working together in communal activity, as a group.
- Activities that connect us to a culture of creating, nurturing, caring for each other.
- Cooking together, gardening together, planting according to the seasons.
- Working together builds a sense of belonging, of being part of a collective.
- Group activities creates opportunities for learning together, and for collective mentoring.
- Sharing duties means having a role, and having responsibility to the group, as part of the group.
- Sharing food means building trust, building cultural connections, gradually building a support network.
- Coming together means giving and receiving hospitality.

## What does coming together look like in practice?

### *Afri-Aus Care Case Study*

Afri-Aus Care's UBUNTU Community Village has seen women from different backgrounds, primarily Sudanese and South Sudanese Australians, come together and build a network of support to overcome the challenges of resettlement.

For many African Australians, tribal backgrounds and engrained inter-tribal resentments still play a large role in shaping their cultural identity. These tribal divides were clear from day one of the project. Many of the women harbored prejudices that had formed centuries earlier and that were still central to their tribal cultures.

To begin to overcome this mutual suspicion, the women were asked to participate in group activities around the UBUNTU Community Village. Such activities included gardening, cooking, and even group meals. By having the women engage in activities together, they slowly began to build a sense of community amongst themselves.

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The women worked together in the shared garden space of the UBUNTU Community Village. As their work began to yield a harvest, the crop would be used in group cooking activities. The women would cook together, taking responsibility for different, but equally important, aspects of the food preparation. The women would then share the meal together which would often provide opportunities for different cultures to be expressed through the medium of food.

In having the women involved in every step of this process - growing the ingredients, cooking the meal, and sharing the food - the women are required to rely on one other for key aspects of the shared experience. This method of bringing people together in shared purpose highlights the benefits that working together as a collective can have in realising UBUNTU.

### *AAFRO Case Study*

On a mid-winter, mid-week Melbourne afternoon, AAFRO hosted a BBQ for the Ubuntu project mothers and their families (AAFRO's Ubuntu Project is called Women's Words). The aim was to reduce social isolation, to bring the parents and their children together, and to model the Ubuntu philosophy of interconnectedness, that is, 'I am because we are'. The BBQ was an opportunity for mothers together to celebrate each other's company as well as do something nice with their children for the last week of school holidays.

Ten mothers and around 14 children, aged 3 to 14, joined the AAFRO team for the BBQ at a local park familiar to many of the participants. It was evident in the way the children were allowed to roam freely around the park and playground, and the women's ease and comfort in allowing them, that they trusted the AAFRO team. Some of our participants invited other guests and their children to join. Many were happily surprised to see some old faces as well as meet new mothers. The BBQ succeeded in breaking the circuit of social isolation for many of the women who do not have many opportunities to meet with friends in a care-free environment.

The children appeared to have fun, spending a large amount of their time in the playground, meeting new friends, and only surfacing when hungry or tired. AAFRO designated one person to keep watch over the kids to alleviate the mothers' worry and allow for a genuine opportunity to have time for themselves.

Many of the children are relied on to act as a language support system, frequently reading or interpreting adult content for their parents who struggle with English. One of the overall objectives of the AAFRO support worker role is to advocate for the parents to relieve their children of the burden of this demand. One of the joys of this afternoon's BBQ is in reinforcing to the children that they are allowed to be children, to be free and to have fun. Bringing the mothers together as a group is one way of working towards the goal of empowering the mothers to this end.



# Connectedness

## What does it mean to be connected?

- Connectedness means feeling connected to a group, to a community, to one's own culture.
- It means having company, not feeling alone.
- It means friendship and togetherness, uplifting each other.
- Being there for each other in times of difficulty, sorrow, mourning, as well as times of joy and celebration.
- Feeling a cultural connection.
- Spirituality, or feeling a connection to a higher being or a sense of higher purpose.
- Connecting through a shared sense of being human and of being connected to nature.
- Being responsive to different beliefs and different ways of naming this connection.

## What does connectedness look like in practice?

### *Afri-Aus Care Case Study*

#### Mama Veronica's story

Originally from South Sudan, Mama Veronica worked as a counsellor in a Kenyan refugee camp before moving with her family to Australia in 2007. After settling in Melbourne, Mama Veronica gained qualifications in aged care, however she was unable to find work opportunities and places she could put her skills to use.

In 2019 she was introduced by a mutual friend to Selba-Gondoza Luka, Founder and CEO of Afri-Aus Care, who encouraged her to come to the UBUNTU Community Village in Dandenong. From there, through the UBUNTU Empowering Mothers project, a larger community has grown.

Since joining the project Mama Veronica has created a better life for herself, her children, and her community.

While volunteering at the centre Mama Veronica was also assisted to seek work, and as a result she successfully landed her first job in Australia as a Disability Worker, and Project Worker for the other

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mothers who visit the centre. In these roles she supports African-Australian mothers to find work and support for themselves and their families.

*“If I didn’t have a job I don’t know where I’d be.” — Mama Veronica*

She is also a regular volunteer for Afri-Aus Care, facilitating programs within the organisation and cooking traditional African food for the staff, women, students, and visitors who attend the UBUNTU Community Village.

*“We sit down, we talk, we give each other hope and a sense of belonging.”  
— Mama Veronica*

Mama Veronica has also been a key facilitator at the Empowering Mothers project community garden and worm farming, growing plants and vegetables which provides the women with fresh produce used to cook food for the UBUNTU Community Village and those in need.

*“We plant a lot of things in that garden, and a lot of women help to grow the produce. It makes the women feel happy and reminds them of mother land Africa.”  
— Mama Veronica*

During the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown Mama Veronica’s sons gained employment through the centre and worked hard to deliver food and material aid to people in need throughout their community.

*“The kids become so happy coming to the centre. It teaches them to respect the people in their community.” — Mama Veronica*

Her sons also take part in the Black Rhinos basketball program, which provides them with an enjoyable sporting experience and opportunities for integration and positive social experiences. Her boys are happy having something to do, and Mama Veronica is proud to see them off the streets.

*“When they see me working, my family became so happy. They say ‘we were worried about you, but now we wake up and see you working and happy’ and that makes them happy too.” — Mama Veronica*

Veronica continues to play an active role in welcoming and supporting other women to the project, providing each other with opportunities for work, volunteering and personal support. For Veronica, community means you’re not alone:

*“Community is about helping and encouraging one another and helping to give our kids a positive start in life.” — Mama Veronica*

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## CASE STUDY: Safety – Coming together – Connectedness

### *AAFRO's Mental Health Sessions for African Australian Mothers*

Mental health remains a taboo subject for many communities here in Australia. In the African context, social stigma has meant that mental illness is a hidden issue. The heartbreakingly high rates of self-harm and suicide among young people, especially, is evidence of what some describe as a silent epidemic. African Australian mothers participating in AAFRO's Women's Words program have brought this issue forward as a topic they wish to discuss, to help themselves, their children and the community. So, to try and address this silence and stigma, and to increase mental health literacy and promote help-seeking, AAFRO facilitates a mental health session with a guest psychiatrist.

For such a sensitive discussion to take place, it is vital that AAFRO creates an environment for women to come together, connecting through shared concerns about their children and families, and to feel emotionally and physically safe to do so. The immediate priority is to create an environment of **safety**, free of judgement, and where participants can express themselves, can be listened to, and can feel that their point of view is valued. Active and reflective listening skills are used to create this environment, as well as explicitly acknowledging the values of the group. That is, that everybody has an equal voice, that nobody is judged on their appearance, or their accent, or their abilities, or their perceived social status.

Coming together as a group and having this in-depth discussion about these difficult issues enables the women to come up with ideas, as a collective, about how to address them. Some of the practical measures they discuss include selfcare and how to look after each other during the pandemic lockdown and extended COVID-19 restrictions. This initial discussion leads to the group requesting another session with a primary focus on their children's mental health and how, as parents, they can support their children's emotional and psychological wellbeing during these challenging times.





## What does the circle mean?

- The circle represents equality, being equal in our interconnectedness.
- In the circle there is no hierarchy, power is shared and exchanged.
- The circle means communicating and listening with mutual respect.
- The circle means men and women, young and old, have an equal voice and listen to and learn from each other.
- The circle represents intergenerational exchange, learning together.
- 'UBUNTU is inside us' - the UBUNTU circle represents our human connectedness.
- The circle represents ritual, in terms of creating familiar patterns, traditions, and shared values that create a sense of security and belonging.

## What does the circle look like in practice?

### *Afri-Aus Care Case Study*

#### Strict Hierarchy of African Culture

Many African migrants to Australia bring with them the strict traditional African values of family hierarchy wherein one-way respect is a necessity of a parent-child relationship. These values are emphasized to the children who have grown up in Australia and are exposed to Western styles of parenting. As a result, African Australian children often feel that they have no rights and cannot communicate their concerns with their parents.

When an African family first arrives in Australia, the cultural differences relating to the relationship dynamics come as a shock. While many African cultures ritualise the transition into adulthood, Western cultures do not and promote personal independence from a young age. By acting autonomously from their parents, African Australian children reverse the traditional power dynamics of African cultures. This shift creates intergenerational conflicts within the family unit and often leads to youth running away from home, mental illness, substance misuse, and anti-social behaviors.

#### Building the Circle



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Afri-Aus Care’s community village became a place where women could openly discuss the difficult challenges and circumstances they were facing. Through culturally appropriate counselling, Afri-Aus Care staff emphasised the importance of equality and understanding over the strict hierarchical structures of African cultures.

*“Two of my children moved out of the family home, they were living a rough life, couch surfing and sometimes going without meals. But they were not able to come home because of the way they were treated. By having open discussions and knowing that I could treat my children as friends, I have been able to reconnect with children and they have now returned home. They were both assisted by Afri-Aus Care staff with job readiness, they are both working and making great financial contributions in our home.”*

—Participant of Afri-Aus Care’s Empowering African Women: UBUNTU in Practice

Through the concepts of UBUNTU, the women were encouraged to work with their children and see them as friends. In doing this, the women were able to mentally deconstruct the hierarchies that had been ingrained within them and take the opportunity to rebuild their family relationships.

*“Initially I did not understand when I was told to take my children as my friends, I was scared I was going to lose my power and authority over my children, my children have now become very close to me, we talk we laugh, we exchange jokes and there is no hatred in my house, this has been made possible because I stopped ordering my children to do things, using strict traditional African values, which I have learnt in a hard way they don’t work in Australia”*

—Participant of Afri-Aus Care’s Empowering African Women: UBUNTU in Practice

The women initially showed resistance to this aspect of UBUNTU, but as time went on the benefits of this approach to healing became clear.

*“I never thought I could sit down and laugh with my mum and tell her all my secrets without being yelled at.”*

—Participant of Afri-Aus Care’s Empowering African Women: UBUNTU in Practice



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# Storytelling

## What does storytelling involve?

- Storytelling means sharing.
- Storytelling means listening with empathy, openness, no judgment.
- Sharing stories involves an exchange, two-way conversation,
- Sharing our stories is risky - it means opening ourselves up. We must be careful not to leave open wounds.
- Sharing stories is a way of solving problems together, healing wounds.
- Using story as healing requires care, empathy and gentleness.

## What does storytelling look like in practice?

### *Afri-Aus Care Case Study*

UBUNTU is collectivism in practice. It means to see oneself in another, acknowledge the challenges they face, and to recognize that a problem shared is a problem half-way solved.

These UBUNTU Guidelines have been developed through the work Afri-Aus Care and AAFRO do with the African Australian community. The people these organisations serve face social disadvantage at a disproportionate rate relative to the general population. The strict traditional African values instilled within this group means that to discuss these issues openly is a taboo. Instead, they hold in their emotions and isolate themselves from usual support mechanisms, not realizing that by repressing their emotions they are only allowing their discontent to fester into mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety, leading some in extreme circumstances to attempt or complete suicide.

The UBUNTU principal of storytelling can be expressed by the story of Afri-Aus Care's founder, Selba-Gondoza Luka. Selba-Gondoza migrated to Australia from Malawi in 1998 and while she now calls Australia home her journey to resettlement has been far from easy. Selba-Gondoza had worked as a Cartographer in Malawi, but the different systems used in Australia meant that her qualifications were not transferrable. Selba-Gondoza could not afford to go to university and took on work as a hotel cleaner. The shift from her white-collar work to manual labor is a dramatic one but also an experience that is all too common within African migrant demographics.

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Selba-Gondoza eventually found work as the night manager of a retirement village and in time she became financially secure enough to begin studying. During this time, Selba-Gondoza became pregnant and gave birth to her child prematurely. Her child passed away in the months that followed. The pain of this experience was amplified when 3 months after her child's passing, Selba-Gondoza was let go from her work and evicted from her accommodation. Selba-Gondoza developed postnatal depression as the environment she found herself in acted as the perfect catalyst for mental health illness. The hardships endured by Selba-Gondoza in this period culminated in her admission to a psychiatric hospital.

Selba-Gondoza slowly overcame her depression in the years that followed and began sharing her story with others. It quickly became clear that her experiences were mirrored by many in the African Australian community. Recognizing the power of her story, Selba-Gondoza established Afri-Aus Care as a vehicle to share her experiences to help others. Selba-Gondoza's story is now used to dismantle the taboos that surround mental health illnesses within the African Australian community and provide a solution through the programs Afri-Aus Care administer, for example, the Empowering African Mothers Project: UBUNTU in Practice.

#### *AAFRO Case Study - School holiday BBQ*

The story of the school holiday BBQ, shared under 'Coming Together', is also an example of storytelling and the principles that are embedded in this practice. The AAFRO team set up the BBQ as a storytelling space by removing all forms of hierarchy and by taking care of everything - from cooking, cleaning, serving, and checking in on the children - to give the mothers the opportunity to just be amongst one another, to start to get to know each other. One of the women brought thermoses of traditional coffee to share, as a gesture of hospitality and generosity.

The women and young people were able to relax and experience the BBQ event as a good space to share some stories. Many of the participants AAFRO have been working with in this project are from Sudan and South Sudan, and they are often fascinated by Mamadou's name due to its meaning in the Dinka language, and its background and history, which usually opens the door for storytelling.

Sharing stories can be a way of solving problems or healing wounds. Often healing comes from the simple things such as coming together. Many of our participants have expressed the boredom, isolation, and over-crowdedness they felt from staying home, being unemployed, and having nothing to do. Giving participants opportunities to leave home and meet with other people, even if only briefly, creates moments of lightness and joy that can become antidotes to negative experiences of loneliness or isolation. Connecting through story brings a sense of belonging through the shared experience of an afternoon of caring and being cared for together.





# Healing

## What does healing involve?

- Healing involves enhancing a person's individual, family, social and community wellbeing.
- Healing involves restoration, restoring a person to a sense of wholeness.
- Healing means acknowledging unresolved trauma, supporting people to mourn and grieve.
- Healing entails forgiveness - of oneself and others who may have caused harm - resolving the harm caused by oneself and/or other/s.

## What does healing look like in practice?

### *Afri-Aus Care Case Study*

Rachel migrated to Australia as a refugee from Kenya. Prior to becoming a refugee, Rachel had been kept as a slave. Rachel was sold into captivity by people she once considered friends and she was kept prisoner for 2 years until she escaped.

Rachel had been informally adopted by a family she met while in the refugee camp. Her new family helped her recover, heal, and taught her how to trust again. When she migrated to Australia she came with her new adoptive family.

Rachel now lives with her husband and children in Melbourne, and dreams of giving them a better life than she had. Rachel's healing process still continues, and she now shares her story to raise awareness of the hardships that many migrants face.



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## CASE STUDY: Circle – Storytelling – Healing

### AAFRO Cooking together as part of Women’s Words

For AAFRO, the circle acts as mechanism that creates an unbroken bond within the group. Underpinned by the values of respect, protection, connection and wholeness, the circle represents the African cultural tradition of togetherness and equality, the essence of UBUNTU represented in the words, *I am because you are*. Storytelling is about passing on wisdom and knowledge to individuals and the wider community, through elders, leaders and others. Healing comes about when an environment of trust and mutual care, respect and listening is created. This allows members of the group to recognise the struggles other members of the group are going through and to provide care and support to help address those challenges.

‘Mo’ is male and one of AAFRO’s cooking facilitators. Based on his many years’ experience in cooking a variety of food from different cultures, Mo facilitates cooking sessions with different groups, including the Women’s Words participants. The sessions involve three steps: planning, activities, and storytelling.

The first step involves the team phoning participants to inform them of the session and invite them to a face-to-face catchup, during which a wellbeing check is followed by discussion about the activities. This involves the group sitting together and Mo starting conversations about the cooking session, what they might cook, how long it will take to cook the dish, and the ingredients required. The group is divided into separate roles and responsibilities. Mo and some group members will do the cooking, while other members do the shopping, food preparation, cleaning and serving.

During the cooking session, the participants share stories about traditional food, and knowledge about recipes, different cooking methods, and where to purchase ingredients to make traditional recipes. Some members of the group have encouraged Mo to learn their cultural recipes and to teach the young people how to prepare them so these traditions can be preserved. During the cooking session, enough food is planned for and prepared to share with everyone in the group as well as other people in the vicinity. This is based on the UBUNTU belief that when food is ready it belongs to everyone who is present.

When the cooking finishes, the group sits around the table (the circle) with the food in the middle, so they can eat together and continue the story and sharing while eating. An important part of the storytelling phase includes listening to traditional music from their countries of origin, sharing stories about their lives in their home countries, and discussion about including young people in the cooking to keep some of the traditions and recipes alive. Everyone in the group contributes to planning, activities and storytelling. In this way, together we build a stronger community.

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Cooking is a consistent tradition and an important part of AAFRO’s Women’s Words program. Food is used as a tool to bring participants together and a way of fostering genuine conversations on diverse topics in a safe, non-confrontational environment, without hierarchy. Working in the kitchen and preparing food together provides the opportunity to exchange knowledge and share information about nutrition and healthy cooking options. Cooking together plays another important role in challenging of traditional gender norms in terms of the roles and expectations of a male person in a kitchen environment.

**The circle** is inclusive and represents everyone take part and having a role in the cooking process. Most importantly, there is no hierarchy in this activity. The UBUNTU leader is also learning from every other participant through the sharing of memories, experiences and stories about food and cooking. Through food, **storytelling** brings people together and the passing on of traditional recipes and stories about food is about maintaining family and community traditions and cultural values. Healing comes about through being valued as part of the group and meeting with like-minded people. As one single mother shares: “At home I am a man and a woman. Today I am just the woman.” For her, this relief and sense of restoration of balance is a form of **healing**.





# Empowerment

## What does it mean to empower people?

- Empowerment involves healthy engagement with others (as opposed to unhealthy relationships).
- Empowerment may be achieved through earning English, having opportunities to volunteer and /or learning about volunteering
- Empowerment can occur through opportunities to teach and impart skills or experiences to others.
- It takes a village to empower individuals.

## What does empowerment look like in practice?

### *Afri-Aus Care Case Study*

While some children dream of being firefighters, doctors, or teachers, Chizo's dream was simply to gain an education. Chizo was raised in poverty and even her dream of an education seemed far outside the confines of her environment.

Chizo's father had abandoned her as a child and left her mother to raise her while working as a cleaner. Irrespective of Chizo's dream, her life seemed to be already planned for her from day one. She had an arranged marriage and had soon after had two children. Her life consisted of work and raising the children and, while this was undoubtedly rewarding for her, it was far from her dream of an education.

Her dream seemed to be nearing an actuality when she and her family migrated to Australia. However, she quickly learnt the harsh reality that as a mature-aged migrant mother with low levels of English proficiency an education would be near impossible to obtain.

Chizo was referred to Afri-Aus Care by one of the mother's employed through the *Empowering African Mothers: UBUNTU in Practice* program. Here she was able to learn English and connect with others in who were in a similar situation. She now refers other women to the program and acts as an ambassador for the women from her country.

When people are offered support services and endless opportunities it gives them the chance to build a life. At Afri-Aus Care the programs are designed to help African Australians achieve their potential through self-belief and empowerment, regardless of their age.

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Today, Chizo is living and working in Australia, far from where she began. She often comes to Afri-Aus Care community village to impart her knowledge and share her story, using her own difficulties as a tool to empower other migrants to overcome the challenges of resettlement.



*AAFRO Case Study - Lisa attending her son's court hearing for the first time*

Lisa (not her real name) is an African mother of four, with a teenage son who is due to appear in court soon. Lisa's son has had brushes with the law in the past, but he has always dissuaded his mother from attending his court hearings. This time, the AAFRO team encouraged and supported Lisa to attend court, to demonstrate to the court that her son has family support, to show him that she cares, and to increase her confidence in engaging with a daunting legal process. She was able to do this, for the first time, only because she had the support of the AAFRO team.

Following the court hearing and seeing the joy and reassurance that her presence brought to her son, Lisa expressed how grateful she was to AAFRO for encouraging and supporting her to attend court. This was cemented by a follow up phone call from Lisa's son shortly after the hearing. He called to express his gratitude and appreciation to his mother for her attendance and the AAFRO team for their support.

This is UBUNTU in practice, and empowerment in action. Support empowers support, through which family connection is strengthened.

For many young people in the African Australian community, hardships are usually endured alone and with minimal family support or involvement, due to stigma, shame, and embarrassment. This isolation perpetuates the cycle of disconnection and widens the gap between parents and children.

Lisa was emotional after the hearing, expressing all the positive attributes of her son and relaying the joy she got after seeing him through the screen. Her presence also affirmed to the son that he is loved, supported, and welcomed home without judgement.

\*The outcome of this hearing: Lisa's son was released. Since then, both have attended AAFRO programs and engaged with the AAFRO team for support.







# Collaboration

## What does it mean to work in collaboration?

- Collaboration means working in partnership.
- Collaboration depends on mutual trust.
- Collaboration requires communication, listening, exchange.
- Collaboration involves teaching, learning & modelling (e.g. sharing *UBUNTU* with others, peers).
- It involves cultural exchange, embracing other cultures, other ways of living.

## What does collaboration look like in practice?

### *Afri-Aus Care Case Study*

Culture is one factor that can have an influence on how people think and behave. Individualistic cultures are those that stress the needs of the individual over the needs of the group. Such cultures are uncommon within African traditions. In Western society, individuality and independence are highly valued. In contrast, Africa is built on collectivist cultures. 'I am because we are' emphasises the strong collectivism that many African cultures embrace. Lack of connectivity of African Australians with the Australian environmental context leaves many African Australians feeling isolated and alone. This often leads to an array of challenges such as:

- Tribalism
- Sibling rivalry
- Intergenerational conflict
- Family violence leading to marriage breakdowns.
- Division of families within African communities
- Experiences and effects of racism

The reintroduction of *UBUNTU* in practice to a small number of women within a few months has proven people can work together, even if they come from different tribes.

Afri-Aus Care started working with 20 women in early 2021 in the *Empowering African Mothers: UBUNTU in Practice* program. As months passed by, the number of women continued to increase. Through the empowerment program these women began to feel a part of a collective again, they

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were able to seek support from one another, help each other in times of need, and learn how to adapt to the challenges of Australia together.

The women got the support they needed through intensive case management and the majority have started working while continuing to connect with the program because it provides them with a sense of belonging. These women come from many South Sudanese tribes and despite the ingrained tribal prejudices, the UBUNTU principles have allowed them to look past their backgrounds. Afri-Aus Care Community Village has been a focal point for women from different walks of life and these women relish the opportunity to practice UBUNTU. Several organizations often come to collaborate with the mothers and in doing so adopt the concept of UBUNTU.

Afri-Aus Care Community Village is a place where these Mamas can redevelop their collectivist culture. The Mamas come to the centre twice a week, meeting in the morning and often staying until late at night. They share their stories and in doing so build strong community ties.



#### *AAFRO Case Study - COVID 19 Group Information Session*

An important part of AAFRO's support work is coming together collaboratively to discuss issues of concern to the group. One of the issues that became apparent this year was an increasing level of misinformation about COVID-19. The need to facilitate open discussions to learn about the virus is an important part of keeping our families and communities safe. The AAFRO team and the Aunties (as we call the mothers in the group) agreed to bring along an expert to provide firsthand information on the virus.

AAFRO invited Dr Sara, who is as an infectious disease specialist, and Mary, an Arabic interpreter.

Dr. Sara explained that she and her husband have been working in hospitals and have seen firsthand the devastation that COVID has had on people. Dr. Sara explained how the virus spreads and its effects. Dr. Sara stated that we must battle the virus stigma and assured the aunties that contracting the virus is nothing to be ashamed of and can happen to anyone during any circumstance.

Dr Sara also spoke about the importance of getting tested for their safety and that of their families when they feel symptoms and showed the group a short video of her conducting the test on herself to show the groups that it is not complicated or scary. She went on to notify the Aunties that, if losing work hours is a concern and a deterrent from getting the test and isolating, there is stay-at-home financial support available to people who are forced to stay home due to COVID testing.

Dr. Sara spoke about the vaccine and the hesitancy within the community due to misinformation. Dr. Sara debunked several myths such as the vaccine containing COVID within it. She went on to explain how the vaccine is made up, how it works to build anti-bodies to familiarize the body in preparation for contracting the virus, and that it is completely safe.

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After completing her session, the floor was open for the Aunties to ask questions. Aunty Cecilia asked Dr. Sara what the process is to get the vaccine should they decide to take it. Dr. Sara informed the group that she will send resources for some pop-up clinics that have recently been set up in several locations that they can look into and the AAFRO team can facilitate for the women.

Aunty Lucy also contributed to the conversation and shared her story of being pro-active in taking the vaccine by finding a clinic that was administering vaccines.

Dr. Sara asked the women how they can improve access to vaccines within the community. The Aunties suggested that Dr Sara revisit as an opportunity to talk to other women about the safety of the vaccine, and to give the community members an opportunity to ask questions to ease their fears, just as they have.

Through this collaboration the Aunties were able to obtain the vital information about the virus and to make informed decisions about whether to take the vaccine or not. As it now stands, 70-80% of the Aunties have had their first shot of COVID vaccine.





# Social solidarity

## What does it mean to create social solidarity?

- Social solidarity means feeling part of something bigger and more powerful than oneself.
- It means taking collective responsibility for each other's wellbeing.
- It means taking on someone's challenges as your own.
- Social solidarity meets people's spiritual needs for care and wellbeing.
- Social solidarity is achieved through storytelling, getting to know each other's story, developing empathy through deep listening.

## What does social solidarity look like in practice?

### *Afri-Aus Care Case Study*

In Africa, many indigenous peace-building traditions emphasize the importance of social solidarity. The idea behind UBUNTU is that all human beings are interdependent. It empathizes the importance of people working together, supporting each other, whether they come from the village, the city, or refugee camps, they have something in common, they are African, and they should be proud. Majority of African Australians do not feel they connect to society, they live in a land where they feel like outcast. UBUNTU teaches we are human because we belong, participate, and share in our society. When you lose that sense of belonging and social solidarity, you feel inadequate and unable to provide a positive contribution to society.

Many African Australians arrived in Australia with high expectations and while it has been very difficult for many African Australians to work together, they find comfort and solidarity in the fact that they are all facing the same challenges. Afri-Aus Care works to identify the issues people are facing and offers near-endless opportunities by working with the community. In doing this, Afri-Aus Care builds solidarity in the community. The model below highlights the steps Afri-Aus Care adopts in rebuilding social solidarity and a sense of community within Australia.

Relearning the practice of UBUNTU allows African Australians to rebuild solid connection between the mothers and their children. At the Centre people take collective action, they work together in the garden knowing it serves a bigger purpose. They volunteer in the food relief program knowing it serves a bigger purpose than themselves. People uplift and empower each other. The women have become public speakers and counselors within the community. They have regained their sense of pride and self-esteem. They support one another, they escort each other to hospitals and GPs, interpreting messages for others. The Mamas work with Afri-Aus Care to rebuild the community and practice UBUNTU knowing they are leading the way for the community.

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## CASE STUDY: Empowerment – Collaboration – Social solidarity

Melbourne’s rolling lockdowns during 2020-21 meant many people experienced increasing social isolation. To maintain connection with their Women’s Words participants, AAFRO created an online platform where mothers could meet remotely for 2 to 3 hours a week. There was a little resistance from some who lacked digital skills or access to technological devices, while others were fascinated with the online platform (Zoom) having seen it on television but not having used it themselves. Through training and support the mothers became increasingly familiar with Zoom and gradually started to gain confidence to join online by themselves, without support. This was digital **empowerment** happening before our eyes!

During these online get togethers, Women’s Words participants decided on various discussion topics, and in some instances experts would join in the group to provide information on topics such as COVID-19, education rights for children, and job readiness. With this information, mothers were empowered to make informed decisions for themselves and their family. This regular online meeting also allowed mothers to come together on a regular basis and maintain social contact during lockdown. This was an important way of empowering mothers to reduce social isolation and to thus look after their own and others’ emotional wellbeing. The mothers learnt new skills through which they gained confidence to be able to access an online community, which they had not experienced before. These new-found digital skills helped to create a sense of connection, belonging and social solidarity.





# UBUNTU leadership

## What does *UBUNTU* leadership mean and why is it important?

- UBUNTU leadership is collaborative and focused on mutual care, wellbeing, trust and personal growth.
- UBUNTU leadership means modelling UBUNTU principles of working together – as a community and in the community – to promote peace and co-existence. It means leading with empathy.
- UBUNTU leadership does not mean one should not consider themselves, it merely suggests leading with the intent of improving the community around you.
- It means providing a strong sense of solidarity and emphasising that one person’s success is everyone’s success.
- UBUNTU leadership is important because working in an UBUNTU way is demanding. It requires flexibility, adaptability, creativity, and forgiveness to be able to respond to our own human needs and those of others.
- It requires self-awareness and the ability to reflect on how we think, feel and act towards each other.
- It requires guidance, friendship, solidarity. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, as the UBUNTU saying goes, humans need other humans to survive and thrive.

## What does *UBUNTU* leadership look like in practice?

**AAFRO CASE STUDY:** In 2005, ‘Pelly’ arrives in Australia from Africa with her four children aged between 7 and 16 years. She has no formal training and very limited English language. Now, in 2021, she has spent 16 years being a stay-at-home mother, caring for her children, which means she has never been in paid employment in Australia, and nor does she have a tax file number. She is keen to work, though, but when she decides to look for work, she realises her chances for employment are limited, given her lack of work experience and her sense that she lacks skills necessary for the workplace.

She is determined, though, and with AAFRO’s assistance and the support of other women in the community, she has obtained her tax file and has secured casual work locally. She describes the feeling of joining the workforce and having a routine as fulfilling. Now that her children are getting older and less dependent on her, she was keen to work as she saw it as an opportunity for social interaction.

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'Pelly' has stated that now she can support herself and children, her family can finally enjoy little things that they missed out on in the past due to limited resources. 'Pelly' mentioned that being part of a workplace is a good feeling, as it has provided her with opportunities to do things, reduce isolation and boredom, meet with other people and have a regular routine.

'Pelly' has demonstrated leadership by taking the initiative to step out of her comfort zone and challenging herself to try to obtain some level of employment. She has found solidarity in the company and support of other women through the process of looking for a job. Her confidence has grown as she started working to support herself and her family and she is gaining a sense of financial independence. Her personal growth has positive flow-on effects for her children, too, as their confidence as individuals and as a family has grown. They feel proud of their mother and her courage and determination.



**AFRI-AUS CARE CASE STUDY:** All ten UBUNTU principles are interconnected, as it is in the meaning UBUNTU, 'I am because we are', it's a sense of completeness. To lead with UBUNTU in mind is to lead without greed, selfishness, or power trips. It is to adopt a humanistic approach to leadership.

The introduction of UBUNTU practice to the African Australian women has proven to be successful. Some women were introverts before they joined the group and learnt to develop leadership skills with support from Afri-Aus Care staff. In the *Empowering African Mothers: UBUNTU in Practice* program, five women were identified as leaders. These women were identified as leaders because of their ability to lead without self-interest. UBUNTU does not mean that people should not consider themselves, but that they do so in a way that enables the community around them to thrive.

Nelson Mandela was the true definition of UBUNTU leadership, as he used this concept to lead South Africa to a peaceful post-apartheid transition. He never had the intention of teaching their oppressors a lesson. Instead, he operated with compassion and integrity, showing people that for them to be a better South Africa, they could not act out of vengeance or retaliation, but out of peace.





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## Please refer to the UBUNTU Practice Toolkit:

For all supporting resources, reading materials, practice examples and activities, and to learn about how to implement an UBUNTU way of working in practice, go to the UBUNTU Practice Toolkit.

And visit our websites:

 <https://www.aafro.com.au/>

 <https://afri-auscare.org/>



## References

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