I got home from work one day and my daughter was sitting on the lounge and I could see she was sad and upset...something was on her mind. So I asked her what was wrong and she said to me, ‘Mum, what’s niggers?’ And I got a shock because I didn’t think a young person would say ‘nigger’ these days, and I told her all about it and I asked why and she said that a little girl called “me and ‘Stacy’ niggers”. Stacy was one of the Sudanese girls she was friends with. So I told her not to worry, that “I’ll sort it out”... I felt sick, disgusted. I also felt ashamed. Not for me and my daughter, but for the other little girl cause she is saying these words and probably don’t know what they mean. Yeah I felt sick, mostly in the stomach.

CASE 2 A CASE OF INJUSTICE
Eighteen months after the murder of our brother in the opal mining town of Lightning Ridge, the alleged perpetrator was tried in the Oxford Street court, in Sydney. My family and I with the support of the dear Murray family (who a few years earlier had one of their precious sons killed in custody) attended the trial for a week and a half, reliving that horrendous night and hearing things we found very heart breaking to listen to. To our amazement, the all white jury found the white defendant not guilty. The Aboriginal woman who witnessed the murder was not considered a credible witness. In the eyes of the defense she was just a drunk, and as for my brother, he was just another black man out of the way. That's how it came across to his family. We walked away from the court house that day with heavy hearts.

CASE 5 DOWN THE STREET
I’ll tell you a story about when I was a community police officer. When I wore my uniform, it seemed like the majority of people were happy with me. They were okay with talking to me and their body language was okay. But when I was out of uniform, and I walked up the street, it was different. For example, one time an old woman was coming the other way, old white woman, and the first thing she did was clutch her bag and then she put her bag to the opposite side so it wasn’t on the side that I was walking past her. That’s ... stuck in my mind.
What We Found

We found that, according to those interviewed or surveyed, racism is an all too common experience for Aboriginal people in their daily lives. Of the twenty eight Aboriginal people participating in the project, twenty five had examples where they, or a close friend or family member had experienced racism. They told stories of denigration, discrimination and acts of distrust as perpetrated by mostly non-Aboriginal people. The photographs represent racism cases experienced by some interview respondents. Their examples occurred in Adelaide, Sydney, Murray Bridge, Coober Pedy, Whyalla, Ceduna, Alice Springs and Tamworth. They occurred in hospitals, health centres, banks, schools, aged care facilities, in the street, children’s sporting venues, and in court, just to name a few.

For some people racism was a normal part of their everyday life and, although it was a common occurrence, they were still surprised and offended by it. The majority of Aboriginal participants stated that their experiences with racism had impacted on their physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing.

Figure 1 presents Aboriginal questionnaire respondents’ perceptions of their most prevalent experiences of discrimination within social services. The police were perceived to be the most discriminatory of services. One respondent volunteered, “I’m not even bothered to seek assistance at all” when needing police support. Many people stated that they frequently were served last in shops or were followed by attendants apparently fearful that Aboriginal customers would steal something. Over 60 per cent of Aboriginal interview respondents indicated that they had encountered discrimination in the health services. Two interviewees gave examples of Aboriginal patients being turned away from health care services.

Impacts of Racism

There was a consistent response in how people said they felt because of racist acts. Feelings of anger and sadness were reported by many. One student declined to be interviewed because racism was a daily occurrence for him and it was enough to experience it out on the street without having to talk about it in the classroom. One interviewee stated, “It makes me feel angry which is not good and I don’t think it’s even worth it, all the pain, all the pain.” Of Aboriginal respondents, 49 per cent said that racism made them feel aggressive and 35 per cent said they felt completely disempowered.

A life of living with racism on a regular basis is bound to impact on people in the longer term. Gambling and feeling disconnected from family and culture were the two most prevalent impacts indicated. Figure 2 summarises their responses.

What Now

More needs to be done in Australia to prevent racism. Public awareness campaigns could expose its prevalence, nature in both institutional and individual forms and how it impacts on people. Programs informing Aboriginal people of anti-racism legislation and people’s rights to recompense if it occurs would be helpful, along with support groups for people experiencing racism. Awareness programs are needed within teaching, nursing, hospitality and policing pre-service education courses. Action research could be used to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of these awareness programs.

These findings reinforce the recent statement of the United Nations that ‘discrimination has become “embedded” in the Australian way of life.’