Transcript of excerpts from *I remember my first day* *…* video

Excerpt 1

**Ollie Smith:** I first started work as an ALO out in Midland. Um, Midland is one of the metropolitan offices in Perth. I remember my first day … I felt apprehensive because I was aware that there’s, the Midland region had a very high Aboriginal population but I knew there wasn’t any Aboriginal staff in Midland and I was a bit apprehensive about that. Working, you know, with all the non-Aboriginal people.

Once the clients knew that there was an Aboriginal person in the office, they kept coming in and asking to see the Aboriginal person, or the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, or ask you by your name. With the counter officers, what the counter officers were doing was they were screening the clients and saying, ‘Oh what do you want to see Ollie for?’ And sometimes they would say it’s personal or they would tell the counter officer and the counter officer would say ‘Oh we can help you do that’. So that was, I found that extremely helpful.

Excerpt 2

**Joe Flick:** I first started work in Moree back in December 1981 as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer. Um, the first day I remember bits and pieces of it. Certainly I remember meeting a lot of the staff there and also some of the comments I was getting back at that stage from some of the staff was that we really didn’t need an Aboriginal Liaison Officer and after a time I found that they were right in what they were saying to a certain extent. Because they were saying they were treating everyone equally in relation to the benefits that social security pay. I fully acknowledge that fact, but the one difference that I did find was that the cultural difference of Aboriginal people and the perception of what unemployment benefit and the pensions, how to stay on those benefits, differed from the non-Aboriginal community of Moree and the surrounding district.

I spent about 3 months working with registry staff, index staff and filing bays, et cetera, so that I knew virtually the ins-and-outs of what happened to a claim form when it came in the office. I found that I needed that sort of training and that sort of knowledge-base and I found that it helped immensely over the number of years since I left Moree, and coming to understand a little bit more about what social security is all about.

Excerpt 3

**Joe Flick:** From time to time it did get difficult. There are a number of tasks placed on me by the Aboriginal community, not only of Moree but other places where I have worked. Most of the times I’ve taken on those tasks in a fairly committed way in trying to get across the point of view that those people were saying to me. Sometimes there were times when I had to take a backwards step and say ‘Well I do work for the Commonwealth. I do work for the Department of Social Security. I can not do what you are asking me to do but I can advise you on what’s, the rules and regulations are of social security and we’ll see if we can find some way around what your problem is’. But, it’s a very difficult role and sometimes you can get caught very much in between. You really don’t know which way you should be going. Sometimes there are moral arguments, sometimes there’s legal arguments, it’s a very difficult task.

Excerpt 4

**Ollie Smith:** Establish the context out there with the Aboriginal community because the Aboriginal community out there, they can be, um, you have to build up their respect. So you have to get out there and win their respect in order for you to service those people because, like myself, even though I’m working in the metropolitan area, I’m from the Kimberleys so initially I had a lot of problems because they saw me as an outsider, even though I was an Aboriginal person, they still saw me as an outsider. So there was problems there.

Excerpt 5

**Joe Flick:** Always remember that you’re there working for a group of people, you’re there working for your community, for your other Aboriginal and Islander people. And you’re not there working for yourself. I think you have to have a lot of commitment, dedication, to be able to have the drive to face the frustrations that you’ll face in social security, in working with a government bureaucracy. Sometimes you’re going to get knocked down and other times you’re going to feel on top of the world. I think you have to continually look and strive to meet the needs of the people that you’re working for and I think that there are a number of people, Aboriginal people, around the country, working in social security, who have achieved that and I think a lot of that’s just been through hard work.