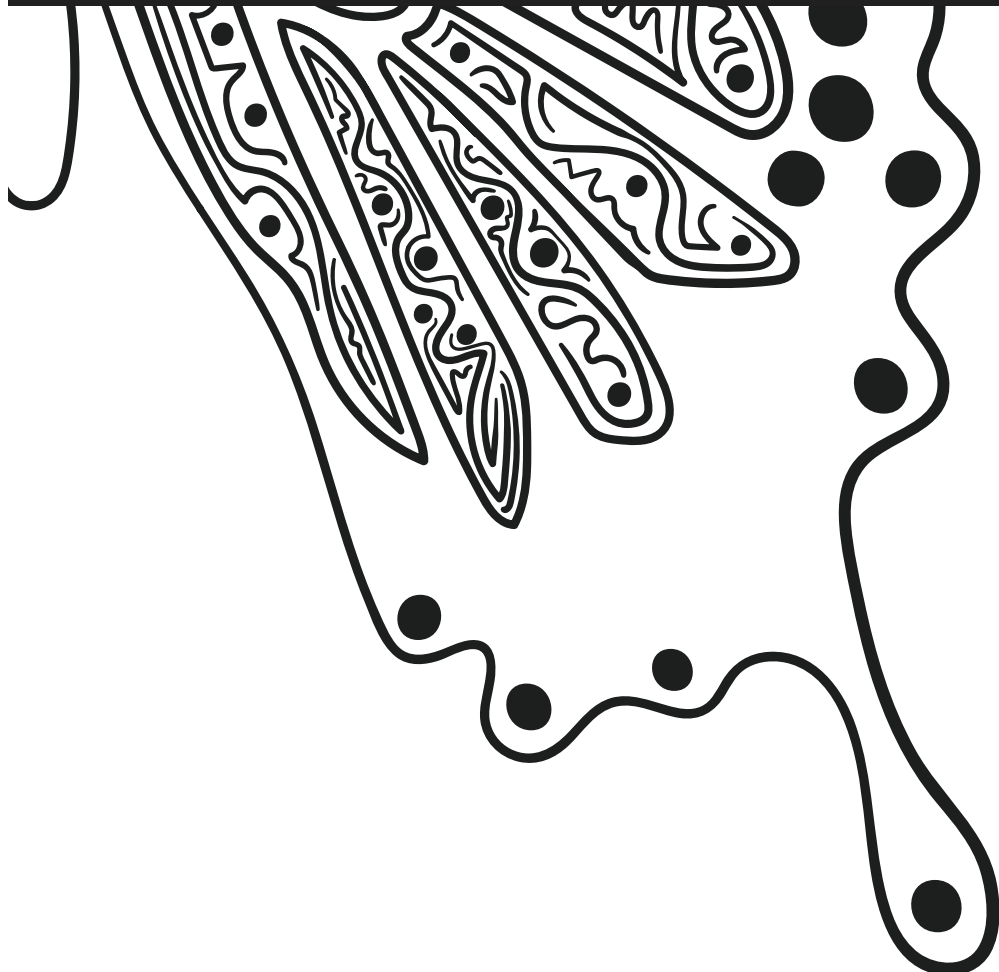


South Australia's Commissioner for
Aboriginal Children and Young People
Report 2021

Youth Voices Report



Be Seen.
Be Heard.
Flourish.



31 October 2022

The Honourable Blair Boyer MP
Minister for Education, Training and Skills
GPO Box 1563
Adelaide SA 5001

Dear Minister Boyer,

I am pleased to present the 2021 Youth Voices Report.

This report reflects the diversity of Aboriginal youth voices from across South Australian Aboriginal communities. It is a unique report that is Aboriginal led, focused on Aboriginal children and young people, about issues impacting their lives, as expressed by them.

The state-wide engagement across many Aboriginal communities sought insight on what matters most to Aboriginal children and young people, as individuals, within their communities and their schools, and as global citizens. I sought specific perspectives on Black Lives Matter, COVID19, the minimum age of criminal responsibility, cultural identity, and the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Aboriginal children and young people have clear, important messages for governments, their schools, peers, and their communities. The purpose of this report is to amplify their voices and their messages to ensure they are heard by key stakeholders and decision-makers.

I look forward to discussing this report with you further.

Kind regards,

April Lawrie
Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We would like to acknowledge the Kurna people as the true custodians of the lands and waters of the Adelaide region on which the office of South Australia's Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People is located.

We acknowledge all custodians throughout South Australia for who the Commissioner seeks to serve the best interests of their Aboriginal children and young people. In doing so, we pay respect to Elders and families, both past and present, and pay reverence to today's Aboriginal children and young people as they emerge as our future leaders.

We recognise the existing and ongoing spiritual connection to the land and waters.

We recognise the historical, contemporary, and ongoing impacts of the Stolen Generations and trauma.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF ABORIGINAL YOUNG PEOPLE

We pay special acknowledgment to the Aboriginal children and young people whose voices are echoed throughout this report. Thank you for your time and efforts in sharing your stories, thoughts, and feelings with us, and providing us with insight into your lives.

We would like to acknowledge Aylee Colson and Shane Strangways who volunteered their written pieces and gave permission for the Commissioner to share them in this report. Thank you for your thoughts, stories and voices.

Note regarding language: The Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People uses the term 'Aboriginal' to refer to people who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This term is preferred by Aboriginal South Australians and the Commissioner. The terms children and young people are used interchangeably to refer to all children with whom the Commissioner engaged.

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COMMISSIONERS FOREWORD



In my role as Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People (CACYP) it is my responsibility to hear directly from Aboriginal children and young people to better understand their lived experiences and what is important to them. It is also my role to ensure their voices are prioritised in policy and practice development to drive systemic change and improve outcomes for South Australian Aboriginal children and young people.

I conducted my inaugural consultation and engagement with Aboriginal children and young people throughout 2019, early in my appointment as Commissioner. The purpose of those consultations was to help me understand the priorities for Aboriginal young people that would inform my advocacy and strategic focus. These consultations targeted the primary school population, and some youth programs, but did not have a wide reach across South Australia.

In my recent Aboriginal youth consultations, I wanted to expand further on issues talked about by them in my first round of youth forums, and issues in the public domain. The world experienced and witnessed huge movements and impacts such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) and COVID-19. I noticed that our young people had a lot to say on social media about these issues. I was impressed and felt proud to see the number of Aboriginal children and young people,

and their families, that turned out to the BLM protest in Adelaide. I wanted to understand whether Aboriginal young people's views and opinions were being heard on these topics and not being confused, marginalised or hidden within the general youth culture and perspective.

When I spoke to young people, I explained that my position requires me to ensure their views and opinions are placed in the right circles of influence, and by doing this I can position the Aboriginal youth voice as a change maker. I am conscious that the Aboriginal youth voice can often be lost in the views of all youth, and it becomes difficult to extrapolate the opinions across the representative Aboriginal youth. It is my responsibility to ensure that my statements and recommendations to government regarding the best interest of Aboriginal children and young people align with our young people's voices and issues that matter most to them.

This report is important because it brings together the voices, diversity and shared experiences of our Aboriginal children and young people. Apart from what we read in the Department of Education's reports on learning and the congress of students, the voices of Aboriginal young people are not highlighted enough. It is critical that we amplify their voices, especially on public and relevant issues, so their opinions and experiences reach decision makers and people of influence, where their voice matters.

When reading this report please respect and value the voices and contributions of our young people.

ROLE OF CACYP



The role as Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People was created in 2018 after many years of Aboriginal advocacy for independent oversight. As the Commissioner, I am empowered to undertake a range of functions relating to Aboriginal children and young people and am the only independent body created solely to promote the rights, development and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people within South Australia, at a systemic level. Important aspects of my role include developing culturally safe and informed strategies and promoting Aboriginal voices with regard for the safety and wellbeing of all Aboriginal children and young people.

On 21 October 2021 the South Australian government legislated the Aboriginal Commissioner role; granting me powers of inquiry, equal to my counterpart Helen Connolly, the Commissioner for Children and Young People. As a legislated Commissioner, I will be able to conduct formal independent inquiries to investigate systemic issues impacting Aboriginal children and young people, and to make recommendations for change, to government ministers, state authorities and other non-government bodies.¹

An integral responsibility of my role as Commissioner is to ensure the State of South Australia is held accountable and complies with the international obligations on the rights of Aboriginal children under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child. The Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act requires state authorities to protect, respect and seek to give effect to the rights of these Conventions.²

On 30 June 2022, I launched an Inquiry into South Australia's removal of Aboriginal children and the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle. This is the first inquiry of its kind in South Australia; led by an Aboriginal Commissioner solely regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. I intend to publish my findings and recommendations in late 2023.

INTRODUCTION



This report captures my second state-wide Aboriginal youth engagement process; a dedicated five months of extensive youth forums and consultations, seeking perspectives and insight from Aboriginal children and young people on the issues that matter most to them and their families.

Since the 2019 consultations, several issues relevant to the development, wellbeing and identity of Aboriginal children have emerged; it is my responsibility to understand the perspective of Aboriginal children and young people.

I am committed to amplifying the voices of Aboriginal children. These youth voices provide insight into how the rights of Aboriginal children and young people, as laid out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the United Nations Conventions of the Rights of the Child, are exercised, and where governments fall short or fail to uphold their rights.

These consultations serve to drive the continuing priorities, advocacy, and reforms needed to enhance the lives of South Australian Aboriginal children and young people. It also provides an opportunity for our young people to be heard on matters that are vital to them, their futures, and their communities. Our young people are our future leaders, they must have every opportunity to feel heard, be seen, and to learn to occupy space as they are entitled to do so, and that their inherent cultural authority allows them.

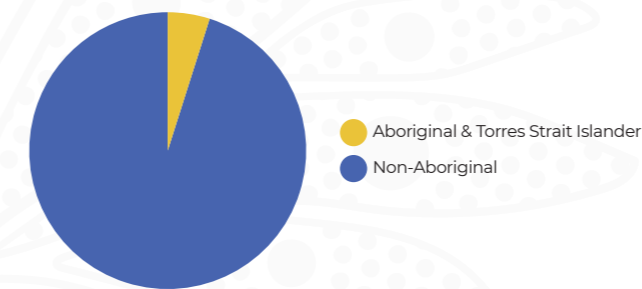
Our young people are conscious, compassionate, and compelling. Their youth does not diminish their power or experiences as young Aboriginal people. Our young people remain hopeful, family centred, and passionate about their cultures.

Our young people have spoken, we have listened. These are their voices.

SNAPSHOT OF SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

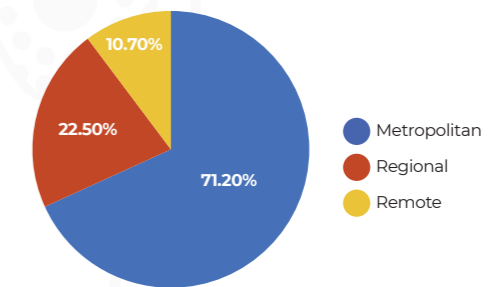
In 2020, there were 18,000 Aboriginal children and young people, representing 4.9% of all children and young people in South Australia under the age of 18.³

Total number of South Australian children and young people



Child Development Council South Australia. *How are they faring? South Australia's Report Card for children and young people.* 2021, page 7. Adelaide, South Australia.

South Australian Aboriginal families by region



Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Australia's children, in brief, 2019*, page iv. Canberra, Australia.

Aboriginal children represent one-third of the national Aboriginal population (798,400).⁴ The national child population was estimated at 4.7 million in 2018, with Aboriginal children representing approximately 5.9% (277,300).⁵

436 Aboriginal students completed their SACE in 2021, while 170 Aboriginal students graduated high school with a VET qualification, or completion of a school-based traineeship or apprenticeship. In comparison, 404 Aboriginal students completed their SACE in 2020, and 219 Aboriginal students graduated high school with a VET qualification, or completion of a school-based traineeship or apprenticeship.⁶

Majority of our Aboriginal families, children and young people live in metropolitan Adelaide (71.2%), while 22.5% live in regional locations and 10.7% live remotely.⁷

We continue to see an increase in the number of Aboriginal children placed into out of home care, and into the youth justice system. The latest data reports that 4647 children are under the Guardianship orders in South Australia, of which 1675 are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.⁸ Aboriginal children represent less than 5% of the total population of children and young people under 18, yet 36.7% of children and young people in care⁹ and, 55.3% of the daily average population in Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre.¹⁰ The Guardian for Children and Young People recently reported 30 dual involved¹¹ Aboriginal young people were detained at Kurlana Tapa during 2021.¹²

The harsh reality of this data was evident amongst the youth forums with an overwhelming amount of Aboriginal young people in care. The Closing the Gap strategy aims to reduce the rate of overrepresentation in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031.¹³ If we do not reverse this trend by 2031, we will experience 14 in every 100 Aboriginal children in out of home care.¹⁴

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

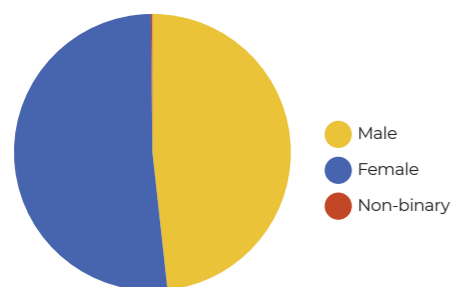
Following my inaugural engagement process in 2019, my team and I again travelled all over South Australia throughout 2021 to speak to Aboriginal children and young people to hear their perspectives on emerging themes from 2020.

I conducted 38 youth consultations at schools and youth hubs across South Australia over a 5-month period.

I heard from 574 students from many of the South Australian language groups, including but not limited to: Wirangu, Ngarrindjeri, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Mirning, Kurna, Barngala, Nukunu, Narungga, Arabana, Adnymanthana, Kokatha and Boandik, as well as interstate language groups such as: Yorta Yorta, Anmatyerre, Warramungu, Barkindji, Arrente, Palawa and Noongar.

Amongst our cohort, there were 277 males (48.2%), 296 females (51.5%). 1 young person identified as non-binary,

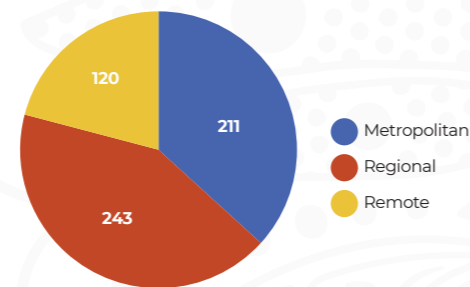
Total Aboriginal children and young people who contributed to the Youth Voices Report



and I heard from 10 young watis.¹⁵

I wanted to ensure we captured the depth and range of youth voices, this meant travelling to regional and remote locations. I spoke to 211 (36.7%) young people across metropolitan Adelaide, 243 (42.3%) young people in regional South Australia, and 120 (20.9%) young people from remote

Youth Voices Report by region



areas.

My purpose for this consultation was:

1. To seek young people's insight on the emerging issues raised in my 2020 Annual Report, including the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, COVID-19, the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) and disabilities; and
2. To continue to listen and understand what issues matter most to our young people.

My aim for the youth forums was to create informal, safe, children and young people-led sessions.

To ensure Aboriginal children and young people contributed to the development and design of the forums, I met with 120 SAASTA students. They provided feedback and workshopped the first session, which informed the rest of my forums.

The young people were arranged into smaller groups of between 4-6, supported by Aboriginal school staff or CACYP staff. They were provided butcher's paper, textas and other writing materials so they could spend time providing their perspectives through illustration or writing. I roamed across the groups and spent time speaking with each young person, discussing, and recording their views. Many students wrote profound statements that demonstrated wisdom and hope. The young people also drew insightful pictures about their lives and communities.

After the initial session, we moved on to a free choice-card activity¹⁶ where I laid out across the floor, around 50 picture cards with the topic listed. The young people were asked to look at all the cards in front of them and consider which topics mattered to them. In consideration of what mattered to them, I asked them to think about what topics were important to them and what topics were a worry for them in their lives; to pitch their thinking as an individual but also in their family, community, their school community, living in Australia, and as a global citizen. I asked each young person to pick 6 cards, and then identify their top 3 cards. Each young person was asked to explain why they had picked the top 3 cards, how it was relevant to their lives and why it was important or a worry. We recorded the quotes directly from young people for each response regarding their top 3. We tallied each card selection.



All young people participating had an opportunity to explain their top 3 card selection to me. I received feedback from many young people about cards and topics they felt were missing from the activity. When this occurred, I gave the young person a post-it note and allowed them to write their own topic. In this sense, our young people continually helped to shape the youth forums. Some suggestions included: reconciliation, body image, caring (young carers of siblings, mothers, and nannas in informal arrangements), love and belonging. This card activity allowed freedom of choice to talk about the topics that were most relevant to each young person.

At each youth forum, I explained that we would record their quotes verbatim for authenticity of their views, and that no names would be used in presenting our findings. I have only referred to identifiers such as male or female, their age and the young person's school or region. This has allowed me to identify themes across the cohort and the most important issues our young people consistently speak about.

**Be Seen.
Be Heard.
Community
Conversations**



OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY CONT...

The topics presented (on picture cards) at the youth forums were:

- Animal cruelty
- Animals
- Beach
- Body Image
- Community
- Domestic violence
- Environment
- Fishing
- Friends
- Grief and loss
- Health
- Jobs
- Mental health
- Peace
- Police
- Safety
- Smoking
- Swimming
- Violence and fighting
- Cancer
- Camping
- Country
- Drugs and Alcohol
- Equal rights
- Food
- Gaming
- Happiness
- Housing
- Language
- Money
- Peer pressure
- Pollution
- Racism
- School
- Social media
- Technology
- Youth Detention
- Art
- BLM
- Climate change
- Culture
- Education
- Family
- Food poverty
- Gender equality
- Harassment
- Hunting
- Loneliness
- Music
- Pets
- Pool
- Reading
- Shopping
- Sports
- Travelling

Our approach differed slightly between primary and secondary school students.

All young people were asked the following questions about what mattered to them as young Aboriginal people, as they considered their card selections:

- What matters to you, and by that, I mean what worries you or what do you think is important? In relation to you as:
 - What matters to you as an individual?
 - What matters to you within your family?
 - What matters to you in your community?
 - What matters to you at school?
 - What matters to you living in Australia?
 - What matters to you in this world?

The following specific questions were asked to young people in secondary schools. I introduced these topics with some background information and left the room open for discussion.

- Black Lives Matter: their experiences and how they related to it?
- Mandatory Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR): their views on the minimum age of 10 years old, and how it affects them?
- Cultural identity
- COVID-19: how it has and is affecting their lives, schooling, and wellbeing?
- Disabilities
- Uluru Statement from the Heart: Voice, Treaty, Truth

From time to time the younger participants were asked what they would change if they were the Premier of South Australia, and what would they do to make things better for South Australian Aboriginal children, and to make things better for all people.

In presenting this report, we have analysed qualitative data and categorised quantitative data to provide a picture of the young people's responses. We have identified the top 10 topics that our young people feel are most relevant to their lives, families, and communities. We have collated the responses and perspectives on the specific themes and have reported several main findings and conclusions.

KEY MESSAGES



Major common themes across regions include the importance of family, culture, racism, impacts and understanding of the stolen generation, negative experiences with police and being racially profiled. I have highlighted here some of the key messages Aboriginal children and young people expressed throughout this engagement process.

“Family and culture is everything”
It was clear that Aboriginal children and young people prioritise their family and culture in their lives and want more opportunities to practice and learn their culture, particularly in the school setting with cultural educators from the Aboriginal community. Our young people associated family with safety, love, happiness, and fun; their views reinforce the integral role family plays in their development and well-being.

“Proud to be Aboriginal”
Cultural identity is essential in helping to create strong young people. Our youth value their culture, their languages, and their connections to country. Our young people are yearning to learn and speak their languages and believe Aboriginal languages should take precedence in their schools. Aboriginal children and young people want their culture to be valued more greatly in wider society, and that they can be free and safe to express their cultural identity.

“Raise the age!”
Our young people want the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR) to be increased to 14 or greater. Young people want to see more alternatives to prison and detention, with a focus on genuine attempts to aid rehabilitation and provide support and therapeutic solutions. Predominantly our young people believe that the government should not deny kids their childhood or their families by locking them up; they think that locking children up is unfair and unjust.

“Stop racism”
Racism is highly prevalent and frequently experienced by Aboriginal children and young people. They experience this firsthand in bullying and direct discrimination by police, store security guards, and within their schools from teachers and students. They also experience this by what they are exposed to by society and by how others treat their family members. Aboriginal children and young people want to live in a world where they are not judged or mistreated because of their skin colour, or their cultural background.

“Pets are important”
There was a profound response to the importance of pets and their role in families and young people’s social and emotional wellbeing. Aboriginal young people consider their pets as a vital part of their families; they have strong emotional connections and find comfort in their pets. Our young people view pets as positive influences for their mental health.

“Education is important”
Largely, our Aboriginal children enjoy school and understand the importance of learning. When Aboriginal staff, cultural education, and Aboriginal targeted programs were present in the school environment, our young people expressed higher regard and greater engagement in their education experience. These aspects in school settings can lead to more positive learning and educational journeys for Aboriginal children and young people.

COVID-19

COVID-19 has affected the whole world, and in the last 12 months we have seen the devastating effects throughout Aboriginal communities. South Australia was fortunate to not experience extended lockdowns, however the pandemic highlighted and amplified many existing issues for Aboriginal communities including housing, poverty, unemployment and compromised health and mental health issues. I wanted to know how Aboriginal children and young people felt about the pandemic, and understand their experience with online learning, social distancing, and border restrictions.

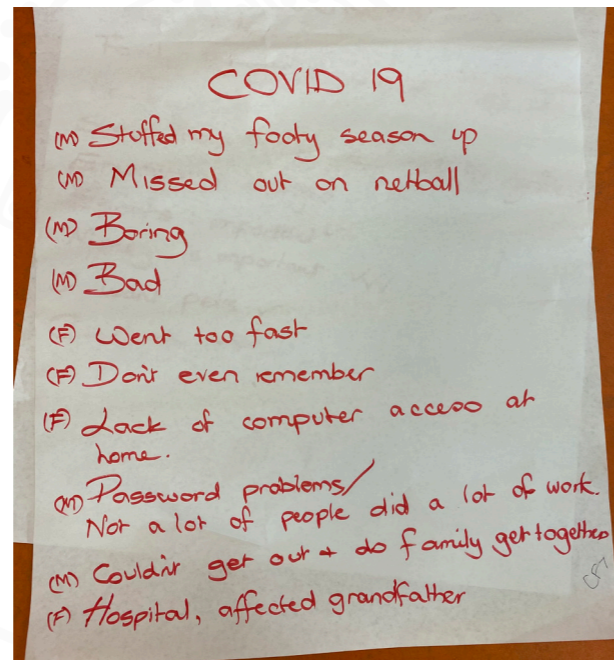
Throughout my forums, I observed a recurring theme amongst Aboriginal young people: COVID had not made too much of a difference to many young people's lives, and most were tired of talking about it. Our young people were conscious that while COVID had drastic impacts on millions of people, Aboriginal people have faced societal restrictions for hundreds of years. Many explained that while staying home was boring during the lockdowns, it was not unusual for them to be at home with family.

"Last year I was pretty scared of COVID but now I've calmed down" Male, Gawler District College

"I had to do home schooling, but now not much has changed for me" Female, Mount Gambier North Primary School

"It was good, I didn't have to go to school" Male, Mark Oliphant College

"Year 8's were unable to go to the camp they had been looking forward to, but nothing else changed" Female, John Pirie Secondary School



The Commissioner for Children and Young People in South Australia, Helen Connolly published a report on young people's experiences with COVID-19,¹⁷ and unsurprisingly, there were a lot of common issues raised between the young people who participated in her survey and the Aboriginal young people I spoke with.

The major aspect of COVID that affected Aboriginal children were the lockdowns, this is shared by the mainstream youth population.¹⁸ I sensed some confusion from our young people about why the lockdowns were necessary, they did not understand how lockdowns contributed to preventing the spread and limiting the mortality rate.

Young people spoke about the impact lockdowns and restrictions had on their mental health and the challenges they faced with their learning. Online learning was non-conducive to some of their individual learning needs, but our young people persevered and were proud of their accomplishments despite the difficulties.

"When lockdown came it was pretty rough. It ruined a lot of experiences for me. Education during COVID was useless for me because the teacher wasn't there" Female, Christies Beach High School

"(the pandemic) brought to light the usefulness of technology and how people can benefit from all the accessibility" Male, Mark Oliphant College

"My school results were still pretty good despite COVID" Female, Glossop High School

"COVID made me more grateful for the simple things, like going to school" Female, Henley High School

"COVID caused unwanted stress. I hated online learning" Female, Murray Bridge High School

Many young people were disappointed that events such as Power Cup, normal sporting club fixtures and other events had to be cancelled. These social outlets provide positive experiences for our young people, as well as keeping them connected to their Aboriginal peers, and their communities, and promoting social and emotional wellbeing.¹⁹

"I missed a whole year of footy in 2020" Male, Ceduna Area School

"Not able to go to the STEM Conference" Female, Glossop High School

"It affected our sports, holidays and our people" Male, Port Augusta

Secondary School

While more than 95% of South Australian's are fully vaccinated against COVID,²⁰ there was an evident proportion of young people who had concerns and worries about the vaccines.

"My Nanna don't want to take the vaccine because she is worried about side effects" Male, Christies Beach High School

South Australia has since relaxed mask mandates and opened our borders. Schools and workplaces have returned to a new normal, and our remote communities have overcome firm travel restrictions. Despite the uncertainty and unpredictability of COVID-19, the pandemic is in a more managed state and our Aboriginal young people and communities can look forward to their usual sporting and social gatherings and visiting their families interstate. Our young people feel that South Australia is now better prepared for any further increase in

BLACK LIVES MATTER



cases, or states of pandemic in the future.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was thrust into the spotlight in 2020, with the shooting of an African American man George Floyd in Minneapolis.²¹ For Aboriginal people in Australia, BLM has been a call out for decades with the significant, and inexcusable number of Aboriginal Deaths in Custody,²² and the ongoing systemic racism and oppression perpetrated across the country. The timing of COVID and the death of George Floyd created a symbiotic context for everyone to be exposed to the reality of injustice, specifically for black people. I wanted to know what Aboriginal young people knew about the history of BLM, its relevance to Australia, and their thoughts on the movement since it went viral on social media, a platform that is accessible by so many.

Many young people expressly correlated the BLM movement with Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. They also recognised the role systemic racism plays in the way Aboriginal and African American people alike are targeted by authorities. I heard stories about family members

who died in custody, with young people telling me this is an issue very close to them. Other young people told stories about watching family members be arrested or harassed by police.

“My Poppa was a death in custody” Female, Cowandilla Primary School

“BLM brings to light the police brutality. We are trying to make it better” Female, Murray Bridge High School

“Cops bash Aboriginal people” Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Training Centre

“Some people said it's too talked about, and that like confused me. I think it wasn't talked about enough. Before it was recorded it should have been talked about more because it was happening before that” Female, Seaton High School

BLM shed light on the injustices of Aboriginal people in Australia, and our Aboriginal young people felt empowered by the enormous turn outs at protests around the country. I heard how proud our young people felt to see people take a stand against racism and the mistreatment of Aboriginal people.

“I went to the march in the city” Male, John Hartley Primary School

“Police were on horses and bikes and were surrounding us at the rally” Male, Kurna Plains School

“Proud of what they're doing. It feels good to take a stand” Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Training Centre

“Justice is important” Male, Ernabella School

“I feel indifferent about it because I can't do anything. Aboriginal Deaths in Custody happen more than people think” Female, Coober Pedy Area School

“People are protesting for cops to

stop mistreating black people and doing rude and cruel things to them and keeping it as a secret” Female, Port Augusta Secondary School

There were a small proportion of young people who did not know about Aboriginal Deaths in Custody but were angered at the rates when they became informed. Some young people told me that while they supported the BLM movement, the risk of COVID-19 stopped them from attending the rally in Adelaide, and others described seeing the black tile going viral on Instagram as a way for people to show their support of BLM.

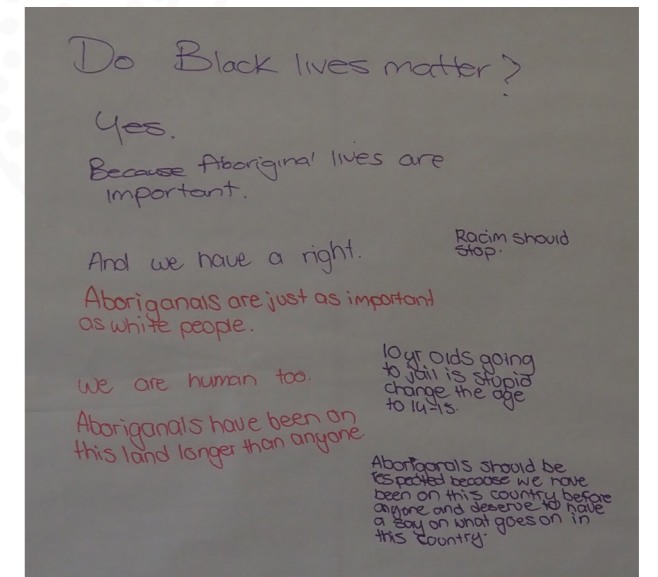
There were some young people who believed that BLM started because of George Floyd and that it was a new social media movement. Other young people disagreed and said that the movement started long before George Floyd, explaining that Kumanjayi Walker was shot in Yuendumu in 2019,²³ and that the George Floyd shooting helped to bring the issue into the spotlight. They felt that BLM helped people in Australia recognise that Aboriginal people are dying because of their skin colour and their race.

“A discussion that was need to be brung up, people turn a blind eye to it, especially in Australia” Female, Henley High School

“BLM is important however not loud enough in Australia” Male, Port Augusta Secondary School

“Aboriginal people are just as important as white people. We are human too. Aboriginal people have been on this land longer than anyone” Female, Port Augusta Secondary School

“BLM is relevant to Australia, like the shooting of Walker. He was shot. I was in that community; he was my uncle” Female, Whyalla Stuart High



School

“Black rights are human rights. No person should be discriminated against because of their race” Female, Gawler District College

“I think its worse in America than it is in Australia” Male, Ceduna Area School

Very few young people felt that BLM wasn't an important issue in their lives.

It is apparent that the concerns of yesterday are the concerns of today. Truth-telling of the black history of Australia is imperative to cultivate cultural identity of young Aboriginal people and understanding from non-Aboriginal people. The travesty of colonisation is that we cannot assume that Aboriginal children and young people are taught their culture at home. In order to counter the narrative of racism, Aboriginal identity must be incorporated into all relevant intersections and interfaces to provide space to foster and encourage a sense of black pride and radical optimism amongst our youth.

The topic is important to so many young people that I met. One young person graciously shared her essay. abA

BLACK DEATHS IN CUSTODY ESSAY, BY AYLEE COLSON (PUKATJA)

Black Lives Matter movement is an important topics to so many young people that I met. One young person graciously shared her essay about Aboriginal deaths in custody.

At least 475 Aboriginal people have died in custody since the end of the 1991 royal commission. The royal commission arose because of the death of John Pat in 1983. He was beaten to death by four off duty police officers outside of a pub in Roebourne, Western Australia. His death sparked anger and frustration with the justice system in Australia and its lack of consequence. The following essay is about the black deaths in custody that are happening till this day.

Firstly Mrs Dhu, Mrs Dhu was a Yamatji women from WA and in 2014 she was taken into custody for not paying her fines and then a few hours after she got put in jail, she was complaining constantly about pain around her rib, but the police didn't believe her and said she might have been faking it. She was taken to the hospital to get a checkup and the next day she couldn't walk so they dragged her out of her cell, and she hit her head on the ground hard, few hours later she was dead. I think that they should have believed her, and the hospital should've given her a proper check if she was in so much pain.

Secondly Mr. Doomadgee, Mr. Doomadgee was a 36-year-old happy drunk man walking down the street singing while holding a bucket of mud crabs on the 19th of November 2004. He was drunk but not drunk, drunk. A few

moments later as he was walking, a police car pulled up beside him with Sergeant Chris Hurley inside of it. He got pulled into the cop car and was taken to the police station, forty five minutes later he was found dead with bad injuries. He suffered four broken ribs which had ruptured his liver and spleen with bruises on his face. Seven days later Bwgcolman mob started a riot and burnt down Palm Island's Courthouse, police station and Sergeant Chris Hurley's house. Sergeant Chris Hurley was never charged for murdering Mr. Doomadgee. I think he should have the death penalty for what he did.

Thirdly, Kumanjayi Walker who was only 19 years old. He was shot and killed on the 19th of November 2019 by Constable Zachery Rolfe. I think it's good that he has been charged. In the history of Australia, no police officers have been taken to jail for a black death in custody. I predict that Constable Zachery Rolfe will not go to jail because he's white and Australia probably has the most racist people on earth. If he doesn't go to jail I will most likely be disappointed because the justice system is racist to all Aboriginals.

Another black death in custody is T.J Hickey. He was riding his bike down the hill on the 14th of February 2004 when he saw a police car, he got scared and "apparently" hit the curb and flew into a sharp fence. The police hid

his bike after the incident which made the indigenous community suspicious. He had 6 siblings that were all girls, and they were all devastated because they don't get to spend life with their older brother. His death caused the Redfern riots.

Lastly, Mrs. Clarke who was a 29-year-old Yamatji woman in Western Australia. On the 17th of December in 2019 Mrs. Clarke was walking on her street with a pair of scissors and a knife. She was feeling frustrated and had mental health issues. Then the police rocked up and one police officer got out of the unmarked police car with no weapons, the other got out with his taser and the third one got out with a gun and shot Mrs. Clarke 3 times in the torso area and she died.

The officer who murdered Mrs. Clarke got charges pressed against him but lied and said Mrs. Clarke lunged at him with a knife and scissors, so he "had" to shoot her. There is security footage that shows that Mrs. Clarke didn't lunged at him with anything. The Geraldton community were angry and sad, so they marched through the town.

I feel strongly about this topic because I have had my own injustice. On the 12/02/2017 my brother Zayne Dennis Colson was running across the road to get something then ran back towards my sister. My sister told him to stop when a blue car came speeding down the street and hit him. A 54-year-old white man called Michael Craig Bullock, with

a criminal record for offences against children, hit him and sped off leaving the scene of the crime. I think he should have stopped and called for help. He fled the scene because he said that he feared for his life but there was only a five-year-old and a 7-year-old at the scene. Michael Craig Bullock killed my 2-year-old brother and got away with it. I believe that if my brother was a white kid then he probably would've been sentenced to jail.

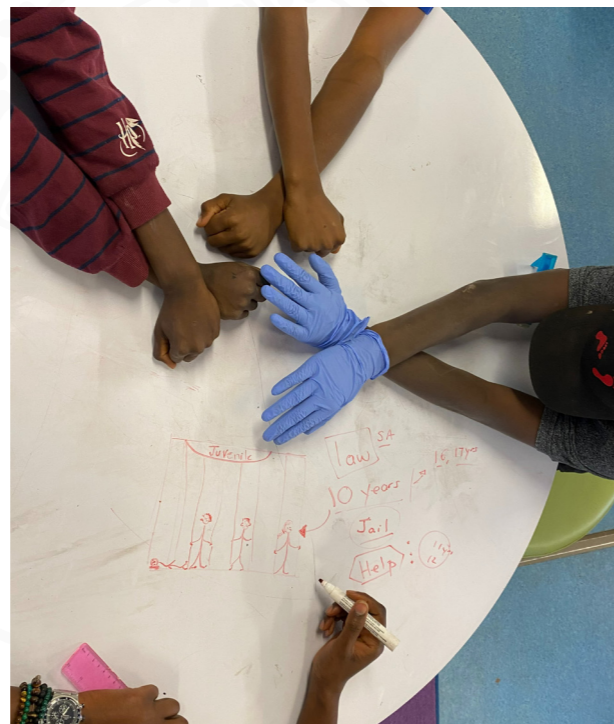
In Australia not a single police officer has ever been sent to jail for killing an indigenous person. The number of black deaths in custody since the 1991 royal commission is unacceptable. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults make up 2 percent of the national population. Police in Australia need to be accountable for killing aboriginal people. The Government is racist and needs to start caring about black people more.

MINIMUM AGE OF CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR) in Australia is 10 years old.²⁴ Advocacy groups, Aboriginal legal services and many others have been campaigning to Raise the Age across all jurisdictions for decades.²⁵ Human Rights experts have provided evidence that there are significant differences in cognitive capacity between the brain of a 10-year-old compared to the brain of a 14-year-old.²⁶ I wanted to know what Aboriginal young people thought about raising the age and youth detention.

Nationally, Aboriginal children are detained up at 20 times the rate of non-Aboriginal children.²⁷ In South Australia, Aboriginal children and young people are 22.7 times more likely to be detained compared to non-Aboriginal children.²⁸ The Raise the Age campaign reports that of all children imprisoned under the age of 14 between 2017-2021, 65% were Aboriginal and 68% had not been convicted of a crime.²⁹

An overwhelming majority of Aboriginal young people agreed with the argument and evidence *for* raising the age, many thought raising the age to 16 or even 18 was a better option. In conjunction with raising the age, our young people recommended alternatives to detention and solutions for fixing the root cause, such as home detention and counselling and, engaging mentors and role models.



A significant number of young people believe that youth detention was not appropriate because children's brains are not fully developed at 10 years old, and they are not able to fully understand their behaviour, or the consequences. This aligns strongly with the expert opinions and evidence on why MACR should be raised to 14.

"It should be 14 because a 10-year old's mind isn't fully developed, and 10-year-olds make mistakes. If they are doing something serious then they should be sent somewhere for help, because if you're doing bad things at that age, maybe they need someone to talk to. They should get help" Female, Christies Beach High School

"The age should be raised to 16 because then they are more mature. If they have a traumatic childhood, cops should get them the treatment they need" Male, John Pirie Secondary School

"Open up an Aboriginal organisation, like a home for kids with no locks on doors and no gates" Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Training Centre

"Resi care kids end up there (KTYJC) because they don't have support" Male, Gawler District College

"Don't lock them up, that's wrong" Male, Amata

"Imprisoning children will not and does not fix the issue. They need guidance, help or rehabilitation and a chance to improve and do better" Male, Woodville High School

"Children being locked up from the of 10 is disgusting because most of the time it's over something small and not that bad. Even raising the age to 14 is even still bad because they're still young and most of the children getting locked up are Aboriginal. They (the kids) can't even look after themselves properly at that age how are they supposed to live in jail without their family around?" Female, Murray Bridge High School

"I think it is wrong they get locked up because they haven't learnt the laws yet so they don't know what's bad and what's good" Male, Mark Oliphant College

Our young people were also of the opinion that many other young people may be offending due to peer pressure or bad influences in their lives. Many questioned whether there were learning difficulties associated with children who were offending, and a large number of young people who felt that detention caused other young people more harm than good, in that detention can create further anxiety and stress.

"It makes me angry and sad. With some 10-year-olds, it's about how they've been brought up. Maybe they didn't grow up with stability" Female, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Training Centre

"They probably got reasons why they doing stuff, like no bunda and they need stuff" Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Training Centre

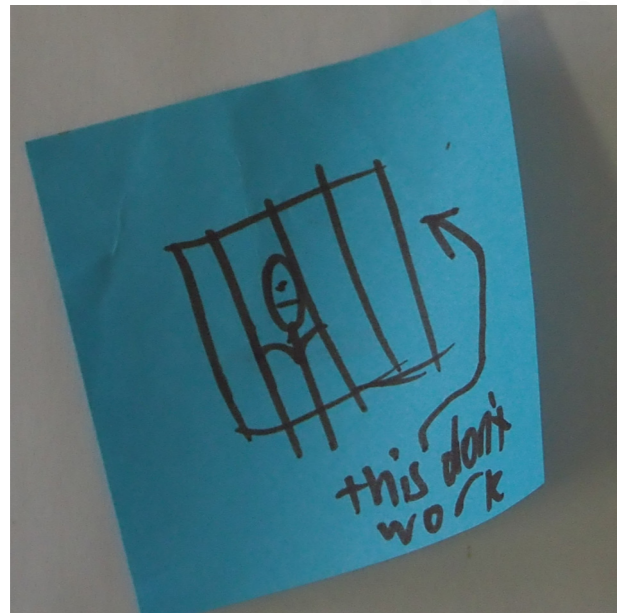
"Need to question why. Is it poverty? What are the circumstances? Have they been abused in foster care? Is it loss of community? It's all about the circumstances. We need to have better support systems for at risk kids" Female, Botanic High School

"The 10-year-old could have been peer pressured or told by older people to do something wrong" Female, Christies Beach High School

"We (blackfullas) aren't bad. We are just living our lives without second chances, feeling left out. Why do we have to sacrifice everything, and you (non-Aboriginal people) get away with everything? This is NOT okay and needs to change" Male, Murray Bridge High School

Some of our young people told me that punishment for criminal behaviour should depend on the crime and your age. For example, very serious offences should be punishable by imprisonment (murder was the most common example), but not the petty crimes that most Aboriginal young people are detained for (theft was the most common example).

MINIMUM AGE OF CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY CONT...



It became apparent during this consultation process that many students, across regions, have had negative experiences with police, have felt discriminated against, have been racially profiled, and targeted based on their skin colour and Aboriginality.

“People follow us around the shop, breathing down my neck. I asked her to stop but she said she can do what she wants” Male, Port Lincoln High School

“They’re (police) targeting Aboriginal kids. We get targeted on in the streets by police. Just because we’re black doesn’t mean we’re criminals. It’s not right” Female, Kurna Plains School

“We are targets. We are treated differently” Male, Henley Beach High School

“Out in the community, its hard being followed and harassed, especially in stores” Female, Port Augusta Secondary School

“Walking down the streets and cops just pick on you. They talk to you and think you did something, but I didn’t do anything” Male, Port Augusta Secondary School

“Police should stop targeting Aboriginal people” Female, Murray Bridge High School

“When we go into the shops, we get looked at more” Female, Christies Beach High School

“When I walk into a shop, I always get stared at” Male, Grant High School

“A lot of people stare at Aboriginal children in stores for no reason” Female, John Pirie High School

“Police is a big worry for me because they are taking kids away underage and tackling them (flogging them)” Male, Seaton High School

Young people had opinions about Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre being given a Kurna name. They felt the Kurna naming perpetuates stereotypes and implies it is a detention centre for embracing Aboriginal young people.

“It’s a stereotype that most Aboriginal people go to juvie. It’s not a place about connecting to culture, it’s just a space, so it’s inappropriate to give it an Aboriginal name like it’s a detention centre for Aboriginal people. Even though there is an overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people, it doesn’t mean it’s just us (offending and being detained)” Female, Botanic High School

The young people I spoke with at Kurlana Tapa had strong opinions on their lived experiences with the Department for Child Protection (DCP). This is not surprising given the large intersection of young people under guardianship and involved in the youth justice system.³⁰

Young people’s experiences with DCP have left them feeling that DCP do not care about them, that there are not enough cultural supports for children in care and that they are “bounced around to case workers”, meaning there is no consistency of rapport and trust. Some of these issues are echoed in the Guardian’s report on dual involved children and young people.³¹

“DCP changes your life. You’re separated from your culture” Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre

“DCP resi care workers choked me. Stop harming kids in care” Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre

“DCP kids only get bail if there aren’t Aboriginal” Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre

“DCP split up my family” Female, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre

“It’s like another stolen generation. There’s no returning home to family” Female, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre

Raising the age of criminal responsibility and implementing more alternative rehabilitation and diversionary programs is strongly supported by South Australian Aboriginal children and young people. Raising the age will decrease the overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in detention but the state must provide trauma informed support to ensure low recidivism rates. As our young people have stated, there are many reasons contributing to youth offending and these must be addressed, including the disconnection of culture for those young people in out-of-home care, stuck in a cycle of offending to avoid their realities in residential care settings. There is much work to do in the intersection of youth justice and child protection systems. Raising the age is a progressive first step in ensuring these children can flourish.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

The fundamental right to learn, be immersed in, and practice culture is a significant aspect of our young people's lives. It is reinforced by the United Nations Conventions on the Right of the Child, Article 30: Children have the right to use their own language, culture, and religion.³² In 2019, we heard our young people describe their cultural identity as a defining factor of who they are and where they belong.³³ As the Commissioner, I emphasise the importance of culture and cultural identity in all my advocacy and work. It is important to continue the conversation with young people to understand how cultural identity may transform or evolve. I wanted to hear from young people how cultural identity is supported, encouraged, and nurtured throughout their lives.

Majority of the young people spoke volumes of the importance of their culture and how proud they were. They considered culture as a strength, something that guides them in life and helps them to be better people.

"I love my family, they are spread out all over Australia" Male, Cowandilla Primary School

"I love my culture, it helps me connect to my family more" Male, Henley High School

"Family is important to me because it's something I don't want to lose" Female, John Hartley Primary School

"It matters to know your language. I speak 7 languages" Female, Whyalla Stuart High School



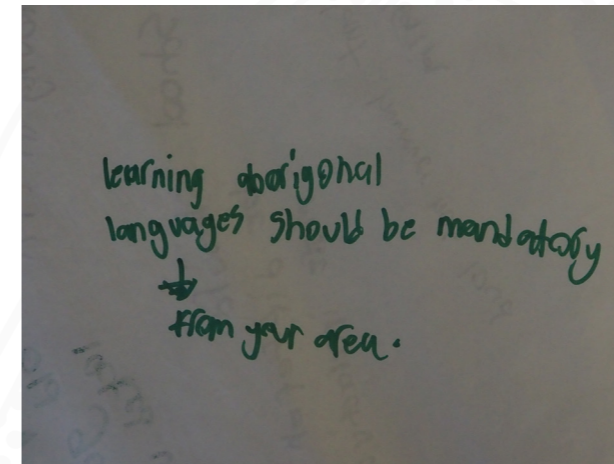
"It's pretty tough and scary as soon as you enter piranpa (white) world, it's hard to go in two worlds. Here, everybody knows who they are, they're strong from culture and family and no one says they're better than others. There, you need to make it alone" Male, Pukatja

"I know the story of the Mulyawongk. He eats all the fish. It's something to scare the kids so they don't go near the water" Female, Cowandilla Primary School

"Cultural identity is about knowing your munda" Female, Ceduna Area School

"I am very proud to be a Ngarrindjeri and Kurna man. I hope to learn much more about my heritage in Raukkan" Male, Seaton High School

Other young people were unable to identify their language groups and felt disconnected from their cultural identity. I recognise this could be result of ongoing effects of the Stolen Generations and intergenerational trauma experienced throughout our communities. Aboriginal children are not born with a sense of cultural identity, they develop it through their connections with family, language, cultural practices, and wider kinship groups.³⁴



"In primary school we had an Aboriginal girls' group and we learnt about Ngarrindjeri culture and language. I grew up on Ngarrindjeri land. I always feel that disconnect from my culture (Barkindji) and I try to learn more and seek out my culture to fill the void where my culture should be. People don't think about the effects that being disconnected from culture has. It can lead to depression because it's a big part of being an Aboriginal person" Female, Murray Bridge High School

"My family are trying to get to know who we are, it was hidden from us out of shame. We're from Alice Springs" Female, Victor Harbour High School

"I wish I was more in touch with Mirning country, with language and people" Male, Henley High School

Many young people across all regions told me they want more cultural learning included at school, as well as the option to learn the Aboriginal language of the area. One young person told me "...schools always say how important our culture is and that we should learn about it, but it's never discussed and integrated into our curriculum".

"Only SAASTA kids do cultural studies. I don't understand why we learn about Vikings and such. We should learn more about Aboriginal and Australian history" Male, Christies Beach High School

"I think I'm Ngarrindjeri. I'm interested to find out more, I would feel more fulfilled" Male, Gawler District College

"I done it (learnt about my culture) at my old school, there were more cultural studies. The elders took us out, it made me feel happy" Female, Whyalla Stuart High School

Young people spoke of strong role models in the wider Aboriginal community such as athletes, musicians, local activists. They also spoke about the important role Aboriginal specific celebrations within the school context, and how they have played a role in helping to shape their identity.

"I want to be like Natasha Wanganeen" Female, Cowandilla Primary School

"I like Briggs and Baker Boy" Male, Mount Barker High School

"I met Jessica Mauboy, I was amazed" Female, Mount Barker High School

CULTURAL IDENTITY CONT...

The issue of stereotyping continued to arise with young people feeling that if they have lighter skin, they were at times made to feel 'less Aboriginal' or that 'people don't believe that I'm Aboriginal'. Our young people have felt judged when identifying, and that immediate assumptions of their character occur when they identify as Aboriginal. It was heartening to hear the resilience of many of our young people who have overcome feeling ashamed and have stepped into their pride.

"I feel proud to be Aboriginal but sometimes people might shame or bully people because of their background" Female, Woodville High School

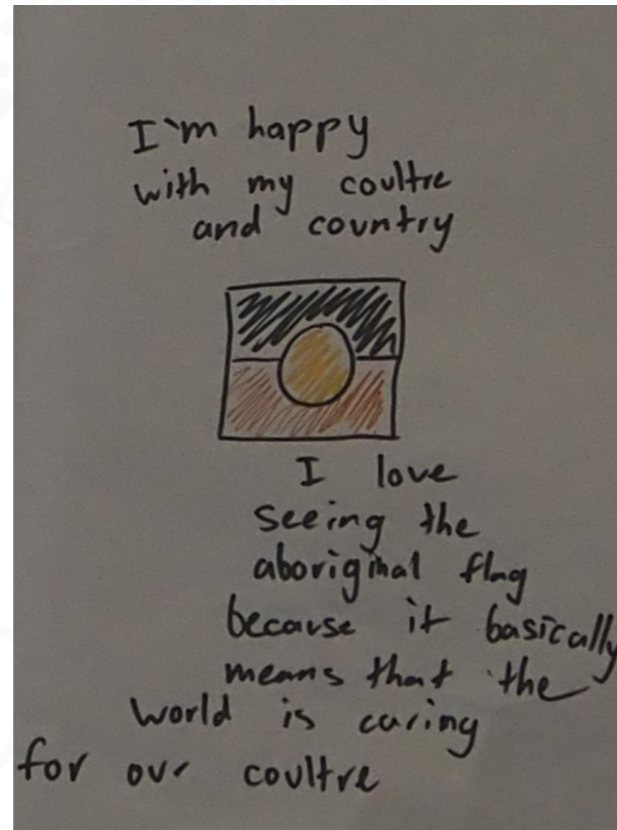
"People often don't believe me when I tell them (that I'm Aboriginal) since I don't 'look' Aboriginal which can be offensive. How I look should not matter" Male, Woodville High School

"I feel even though we have Aboriginal blood, and we look white, we shouldn't be picked on by my colour" Male, Karna Plains School

"They (non-Aboriginal people) don't see us as smart, they focus on sports and not academic. They think I'm friends with violent people, who happen to be Aboriginal, just because I'm Aboriginal" Female, Mark Oliphant College

"I get excluded from some discussions because I've got lighter skin" Female, Coober Pedy Area School

"Being lighter (in skin colour), people think you're not Aboriginal. They expect you to be dark skinned" Male, Henley High School



Cultural identity is a key factor in ensuring Aboriginal young people are raised with robust senses of self and well-being. It is evident that South Australian Aboriginal young people value their culture, are motivated to learn more, and want to ensure cultural connections are maintained for the next generations. I strongly support their calls for more opportunities within school settings to learn their cultures and languages. Increased education about Aboriginal people for all students is not only required but can create more safe spaces for Aboriginal children to feel supported and proud of their histories and cultures.



ELVIS AND THE BIG DREAM, BY SHANE STRANGWAYS (FREGON)

This is an essay from Shane, inspired by the Little Elvis cartoon, but with his imagination and creativity, he has taken a story and made it his own by incorporating his cultural identity into the narrative. This story is fiction and not based on true events.

Elvis was a young fella. His hair was reddish and his clothes were too big for him. Every day he walked around the bush searching for people but every day he would find no one. The bush was his home. His feet were hard from all the walking. He didn't know about cars or planes or any machines. All his life, he swam in water. He swam in the sea. He swam in creeks. He swam in waterholes. His mum called him a fish when he was a young kid. Elvis also hunted fish, kangaroo and ngintaka that had claws like knives. He would make instruments with his hands and play nicely. All of the birds in the bush would sing their songs with him when he played his music.

Elvis had a very happy life but there was one big problem. He had nobody to share it with. His friends were the animals but he had not seen a person since he was a small child. He had got lost out bush and never found his way home. He would walk all day and all night and never see a soul.

Then one day, that all changed.

It was a hot and dusty day. Elvis was trying to find shade to sit under with some water he had collected from the waterhole. He was thirsty and he was tired. Just as he went to sit down under a big old tree, he saw something in the distance.

"What on earth is that?" he thought. He has no idea what it was. It was shining brightly and burning his eyes. It was also going really quickly. It was white and there were little black circles that were making it go faster than a kangaroo.

Elvis didn't know what to do. He ran out towards it and stepped in front of it, but luckily it stopped just in time.

A man stepped out of white machine and yelled at him.

"Hey, what do you think you're doing young fella! I almost hit you! You a crazy fella stepping in front of a car like that" he shouted.

"Sorry, can I come with you? I've been out bush since I was a little child" Elvis said.

The man thought about it and eventually said, "all right hurry up, get in, but no talking ya hear me?"

"I won't say anything" lied Elvis.

He got into the white machine the man called a car and they took off down Stuart Highway.

"Where we going?" asked Elvis.

"Hey, I thought you weren't going to talk" Elvis shrugged.

"We're going to town, Port Augusta. You heard of it before?"

"No, I told you, I've been living in the bush my whole life. I only seen those scrap papers you know that people leave out for rubbish".

The man laughed. Just then, a beautiful sound came from the radio in the car. It sounded like an angel who was singing with all his heart.

"Who's this bloke singing?"

"Ahh this bloke here, he's the king. His name is Elvis Presley!"

"True! That's my name!" Elvis cried out.

"I looked at you and thought you was different. Let's go find you a home little king" said the kind man.

"Sounds good to me". Elvis leaned back in his chair and shut his eyes. He imagined himself on a stage singing his heart out. The little king and his dream.

DISABILITIES

The Inquiry into Suspensions, Exclusions and Expulsion Processes in South Australian Government Schools highlighted significant adversities for Aboriginal children and young people, particularly young people with undiagnosed disabilities.³⁵ The Inquiry concluded that Aboriginal children in South Australian schools are 3 times more likely to be suspended compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts.³⁶ In 2019, Aboriginal children represented 6.6% of total enrolments but 21.4% of take-homes (definition), 17.6% of suspensions, and 20.3% of exclusions.³⁷ Aboriginal children are 1.5 to 2 times as likely to have a disability compared to non-Aboriginal Australians,³⁸ with the main types of disabilities amongst Aboriginal people being physical, sight, hearing or speech, and intellectual.³⁹ I have been told that there are many undiagnosed Aboriginal children and young people in South Australia, particularly with disabilities affecting their ability to learn and concentrate. Data reveals that Aboriginal children are overrepresented in out-of-home care, but underreported in the area of disabilities, and more likely to be living with invisible disability. I wanted to hear from our young people about disabilities and their views on whether it played a role in learning difficulties, behavioural problems, and their education experiences and outcomes.

There were strong empathetic views on disabilities amongst children and young people. I explained that when we think of disabilities in our community, we often think of physical disabilities, but I would like to hear their understanding of invisible disabilities. Our young people conveyed a profound intuitiveness to understanding invisible disabilities.

They associated invisible disabilities with learning difficulties, hearing deficits, language disorders, Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Aboriginal young people felt that teachers were unaware of such disabilities and that the students would not be receiving the much-needed extra support.

Majority of young people said that it is important to raise awareness of all disabilities.

"(We) need to build awareness. Kids with disabilities might not be able to learn as much" Male, Christies Beach High School

"Disabilities can make it hard for them (children and young people). It makes you feel different, or that you're a pain in the arse" Female, Coober Pedy Area School

"People that don't understand are really mean about it" Male, John Pirie Secondary School

I heard from many young people, as well as school staff, that there were extensive delays for psychological assessment appointments. These assessments can provide formal diagnoses, inform learning plans and behavioural management plans for children. A few brave young people shared their stories with me.

"Coming into high school, I had a lot of problems focusing up until year 11 and I had to ask for an SSO. Got diagnosed last year with ADHD. I try and tell

DISABILITIES CONT...

the teachers I've got family stuff happening, they tell me 'So do I!'. I try and explain what happens after I take my medication, but I don't think teachers have enough understanding for things like that" Female, Port Lincoln High School

"They (Aboriginal children and young people) get used to it, then don't think they have it (disabilities), it's like they're immune to it. There's not enough services" Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Training Centre

"It's hard to get diagnoses in children and babies" Female, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Training Centre

"I feel like children should be allowed to be tested via their own consent and shouldn't need adult consent. Some parents don't let their children get tested but the children want to know so they can get extra help" Male, John Pirie Secondary School

"I think young Aboriginal kids with disabilities, or an invisible disability need to be checked because if it doesn't then they will struggle through life. Teachers need to instead of yelling at the kids, they need to actually ask if he's okay because he might not be hearing properly", Female, Christies Beach High School

Young people across regions felt a lack of support from schools; "they (the school and teachers) give up straight away, they don't try, and help kids they just suspend" (Whyalla Stuart High School). This was particularly evident at one regional school where 20 Aboriginal students were serving suspensions on the day I visited, and 20 had been suspended in the two weeks prior. Aboriginal young people correlated the overrepresentation in

exclusions, expulsions, and suspensions to racism, from both students and teachers.

"They (teachers) don't try to know the kids, like find out what's wrong" Male, Woodville High School

"Schools give up straight away, don't try and help the kids, they just suspend" Female, Unley High School

"Sometimes its caused by racism, like we saw a white kid say the n word today and then looked straight at us" Male, Port Lincoln High School

"There's not enough empathy shown to students, and sometimes not enough support and help" Male, Henley High School

"It's because of skin colour. White kids say racist names against us and teachers do nothing about it. We respond and get in trouble for sticking up for ourselves and the white kid doesn't (get into trouble)" Male, Seaton High School

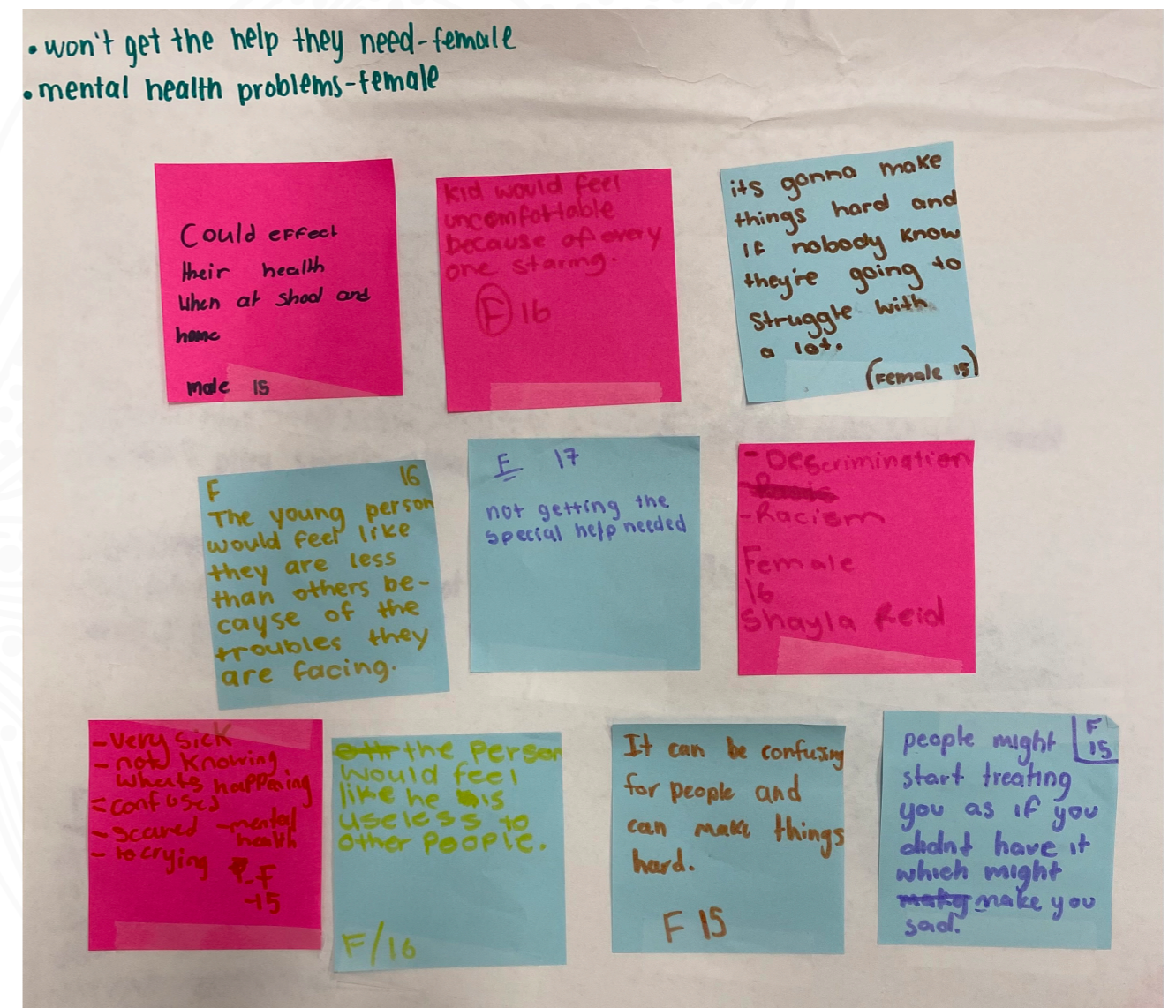
"It's not right to call the police when someone has a meltdown, there's no need to call the police" Male, Whyalla Stuart High School

"Indigenous students should be able to feel comfortable to ask and receive support needed from teachers" Female, Seaton High School

Positive influences within the school context were resoundingly contributed to Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal cultural programs, and opportunities to learn language and culture. If these opportunities were not available in the school environment, young people were vocal that it was needed.

"We need more Aboriginal people and teachers at my school and to learn more Aboriginal culture" Female, Westport Primary School

- won't get the help they need-female
- mental health problems-female



"I want my school to do more Aboriginal culture" Male, Mark Oliphant College

"I love doing MALPA (Aboriginal cultural school-based program), I like learning about cultural stuff" Male, Aldinga Primary School

"We should learn about our culture in school" Female, Henley High School

"The ACETO made a difference" Female, Unley High School

There are reportedly many Aboriginal children and young people awaiting formal assessments. Undiagnosed

and invisible disabilities impact learning and contribute to behavioural issues within our school system. Our children require strengthened support particularly in the school environment; based on their responses increased cultural programs and Aboriginal staff can assist in engagement and increased anti-racism strategies could decrease incidents requiring exclusions, expulsions and suspensions involving Aboriginal young people.

ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

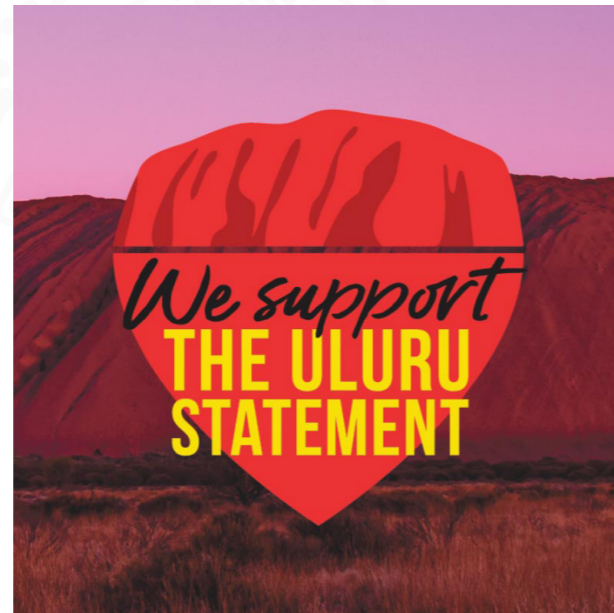
The Uluru Statement from the Heart is the culmination of over 230 years of Aboriginal activism, and the fight for human rights and equitable justice.⁴⁰ The Statement calls for an enshrined voice to Parliament, a representative voice for Aboriginal people across Australia, to be consulted on decisions and legislation affecting all Aboriginal children, people, families, and communities.⁴¹ The Statement also calls for a Treaty and Truth-telling process.⁴² The Statement directly impacts our Aboriginal children and young people, as it relates to the society we want to build for their futures.

We have now passed the 5-year anniversary of the signing of the Statement in 2017 and small efforts have been made to progress tangible reform. Recently, a change of Government in South Australia and on a federal level, have renewed hope. The South Australian Premier Peter Malinauskas and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese have committed to the Uluru Statement from the Heart and a Voice to Parliament.⁴³ South Australia has appointed a Commissioner for the First Nations Voice, Dale Agius to undertake engagement and consultation to progress a state-based voice to Parliament.⁴⁴

We wanted to find out what our young people knew about the Statement, what it meant to them, their futures, and their families.

It was glaringly obvious by the lack of responses on this topic, that South Australian Aboriginal young people have not been educated on the Statement or its concepts. This may be indicative of its lack of presence in curricula and social media utilised by young people.

I captured some quotes from young people about Voice, Treaty and Truth:



“We (Aboriginal people) shouldn’t have to fight for something that’s already owned by us (land and culture)” Female, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Centre

“No one knows about this” Female, Christies Beach High School

“I think Treaty means you meet and have a talk. I don’t know much (about the Uluru Statement) but I’m interested and would like to learn more.” Female, Gawler District College

“People were climbing on sacred land and that’s not right” Female, John Pirie High School

As a result of these forums and the lack of education on this topic, I am committed to hosting a Aboriginal youth forum on the Uluru statement from the heart for emerging young leaders in Aboriginal community. I want to ensure our young people are educated about movements that will shape their future. As our future leaders, we must provide them the space and opportunity to develop informed opinions on how Aboriginal people continue in the unwavering fight for justice and equality.

TOP TEN TOPICS

The top 10 topics selected by Aboriginal children and young people have helped provide insight into what they value, are interested in, or are worried by.

1. Family (30%)

“(Family) it is everything to me” Female, Christies Beach High School

“I love having a big family” Male, Aldinga Primary School

“Family is important because they brought me up and without them, I wouldn’t be who I am” Male, Ernabella

“Family is important because they are always there” Male, Glossop High School

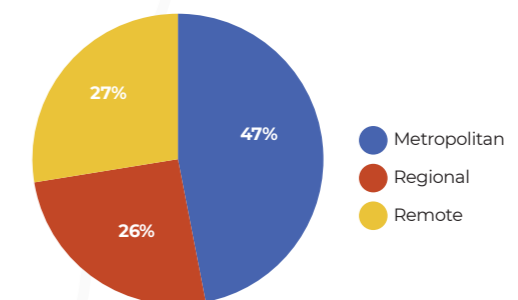
“I love to go camping with my family” Female, Mimili

“You need family. You need to know your mob, its what keeps you strong” Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Training Centre

“Family is important because we have to take care of each other” Female, Lincoln Gardens Primary School

“Family is important because they help me a lot and keep me healthy and safe” Male, Unley High School

Family card selection by region



This snapshot data reinforces the importance of family as number one priority. We know many Aboriginal families move to metropolitan Adelaide for education, employment, medical, sports and other reasons and opportunities. It is known that over half of the Aboriginal population of South Australia resides in metropolitan Adelaide. This data may suggest the craving for family becomes more pronounced when the family moves away from their community of origin. The visibility of kinship systems and interactions with them may be more pronounced for Aboriginal young people in their regional and remote community locations. Family was the highest response for Aboriginal children and young people in both metropolitan and remote locations.

TOP TEN TOPICS CONT...

2. Culture (21.8%)

“(It’s important) because it’s just you, it’s where you’re from” Male, Christies Beach High School

“Being strong in culture means dancing, singing and hunting” Male, Amata

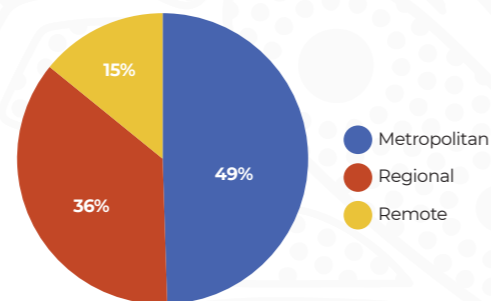
“I love my culture and my family that’s in it” Male, Cowandilla Primary School

“Culture is important because it helps you connect with your family more. You should be proud to be Aboriginal” Male, Henley Beach High School

“Culture is important and I’m proud” Female, Port Lincoln Youth Hub

“Culture is important because it’s who you are” Female, Coober Pedy Area School

Culture card selection by region



Culture is strongly valued by our young people. They view culture as a critical aspect of their self-identity and how they connect to their families, communities and country. The effects of colonisation have impacted our ability to teach and learn cultural practices, but our young people remain intent on learning, sharing, and practicing any aspect of their cultures they can. In remote locations, this may be more prominent and accessible compared to regional and metropolitan locations. There is resounding pride amongst Aboriginal young people for their Aboriginality and their cultural identities. Culture was the highest response for Aboriginal children and young people in regional areas.

3. Racism (18.3%)

“I had to leave my football club because it got racist”, Female, Botanic High school

“It’s all about systemic racism and stereotypes about Aboriginal people being negative. Never talk about the good things that Aboriginal people do” Female, Glossop High School

“We need to stop racism because it hurts people’s feelings and it’s not good” Female, Port Lincoln High School

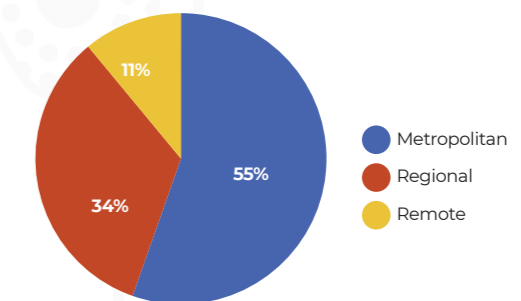
“There’s a lot of racism. Its our land. We got to stop racism because its dumb” Female, Kurna Plains School

“In this day and age, people are saying more offensive words to people. We need to be treated as part of the community and treated as one” Male, Woodville High School

“My family experiences racism, my dad is quite dark so people look at my family” Female, Unley High School

“Racism is important because its better when we play together” Male, Indulkana

Racism card selection by region



There is an unsurprisingly higher rate of children and young people experiencing racism in metropolitan and regional locations. This data may reflect that children and young people in remote locations may not experience or see overt types of racism as frequently as young people closer to metropolitan or regional areas. For example, majority of young people in regional and metropolitan locations told stories of being racially discriminated in shopping centers, or being harassed by police in public; we know that remote Aboriginal communities are more likely to be the dominant culture, therefore less likely to be racially discriminated at the shops or in public. Aboriginal young people are conscious about, and understand the impact of systemic racism on their lives, and communities.

TOP TEN TOPICS CONT...

4. Language (17%)

"I know a little bit of language, but I would like to know more" Female, Unley High School

"Language is important because it is something that is dying and we don't speak it anymore in our family" Male, Woodville High School

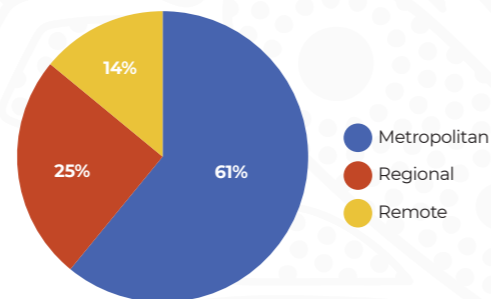
"My Nan used to teach me language, she was stolen generation. I've lost some of it" Female, Botanic High School

"I wish I could speak my language, I never got taught how to speak it" Male, Kurna Plains School

"Language is important because you need your language to connect to your culture and when you connect to your culture, you are much stronger" Male, Henley Beach High School

"It's important to keep language alive" Female, John Pirie High School

Language card selection by region



Aboriginal languages were severely impacted by colonisation and the assimilation policies of Australia, with many languages being lost forever; Aboriginal young people are aware of how precious languages are, and the importance of learning them to continue their existence. Our Aboriginal young people told me time and time again that they would prefer to learn an Aboriginal language at school, as opposed to foreign languages such as Indonesian, Italian, and Japanese. There are some communities throughout South Australia where languages are spoken more fluently, and the Aboriginal language of the area is incorporated into the educational environment.

5. Sports (17%)

"I like to play sports. I like to play footy, it's my favourite" Male, Cowandilla Primary School

"I like playing football, basketball and soccer" Male, Fregon

"I like playing netball" Female, Aldinga Primary School

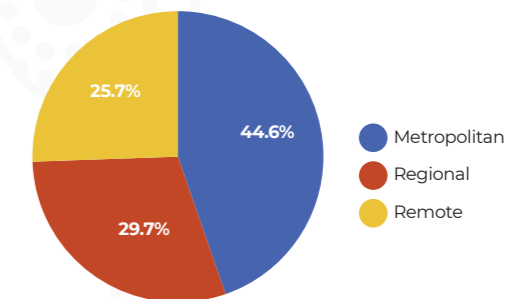
"I like riding motorbikes" Male, Kenmore Park

"Sports is important because it's a lot of fun and you get to meet great people" Male, Mark Oliphant College

"Sports is important because it is a way to get rid of stress and depression. It is an anti-depressant. I play sports because it is fun. I take my stress out on the field" Male, Murray Bridge High School

"Sports is important to me because my family plays at Koonibba" Female, Ceduna Area School

Sports card selection by region



Sport plays a positive role in the lives of Aboriginal children and young people across regions. We know that community clubs contribute to the cultural identity for many Aboriginal people across South Australia, and that it provides healthy outlets and a mechanism for connecting families. Sport was the second highest response for Aboriginal children and young people in remote locations, which may be indicative of youth programs and activities available in those communities.

TOP TEN TOPICS CONT...

6. BLM (16.4%)

“BLM is important because its bringing everything bad to light like police brutality. We’re trying to make it better” Female, Murray Bridge High School

“BLM is really good. It makes me happy that people are standing up” Male, Port Lincoln High School

“The black community want others to realise that Black Lives Matter” Female, Ceduna Area School

“BLM is important because all people should be accepted regardless of their skin colour” Female, Lincoln Gardens Primary School

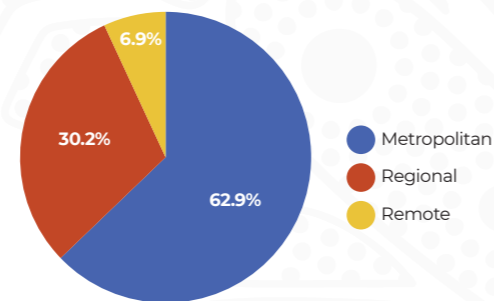
“We need justice for black people. We have been treated differently” Male, Whyalla Stuart High School

“BLM is about mob supporting you, they have your back” Male, Seaton High School

“BLM is important. Black deaths in custody is important but there’s nothing happening, there’s not enough answers” Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Training Centre

“I’m hesitant around police” Male, Seaton High School

BLM card selection by region



BLM was the second highest response for Aboriginal children and young people in metropolitan locations; this data may reflect the level of awareness, education, and response to the global movement. Many young people in metropolitan Adelaide attended the rally in 2020, and had strong opinions about the importance and relevance to Aboriginal people across Australia. While there is some awareness amongst Aboriginal young people in regional and remote locations, they were more likely to associate BLM to an American movement and not so relevant to Aboriginal people in Australia.

7. Money (15%)

“Money is kind of evil” Female, Cowandilla Primary School

“I like money, I can go to the shop” Female, Lincoln Gardens Primary School

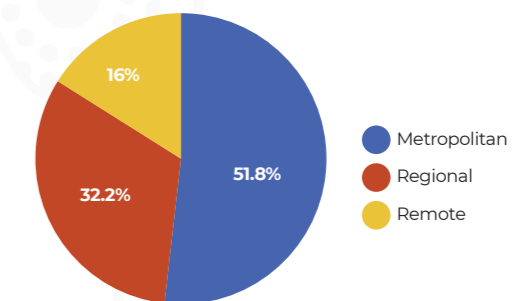
“Money is good” Female, Indulkana

“Money is important because you need it, you can’t buy food without it” Female, Coober Pedy Area School

“You need money so you can support your family, buy things like food” Female, Ceduna Area School

“Money is important because it runs the world. Without money you can’t do anything” Male, Kurlana Tapa Youth Justice Training Centre

Money card selection by region



Aboriginal children and young people across regions believe that money is important. We know that Aboriginal people in Australia are more likely to experience low socio-economic disadvantage, and that it becomes more prominent in remote locations. Their understanding of the importance of money may reflect their experiences with poverty and the capitalism of society; as many told me: “money runs the world”.

TOP TEN TOPICS CONT...

8. Pets (14%)

"Pets are important because they can help you with mental health. They don't talk back, you can vent to them and they won't give you unnecessary advice. I love them" Female, Coober Pedy Area School

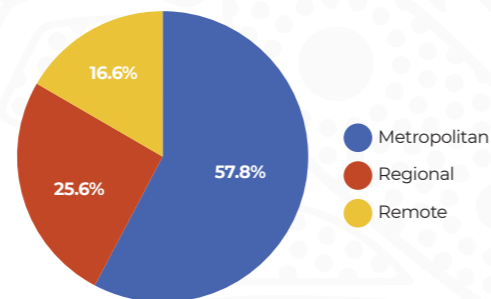
"Pets are cute" Female, Lincoln Gardens Primary School

"I like dogs and puppies – papy-kulumba" Female, Amata

"Pets are important. I love them" Female, Cowandilla Primary School

"Pets are important because they are always there for you" Female, Murray Bridge High School

Pets card selection by region



At every youth forum across South Australia, I was always surprised at the importance placed on pets. Aboriginal children and young people always included pets as family, spoke about the love they have for their pets, and the positive impact pets have on their mental health and well-being.

9. Social media (14%)

"I like TikTok and Snapchat" Female, Pukatja

"Social media is good" Male, Fregon

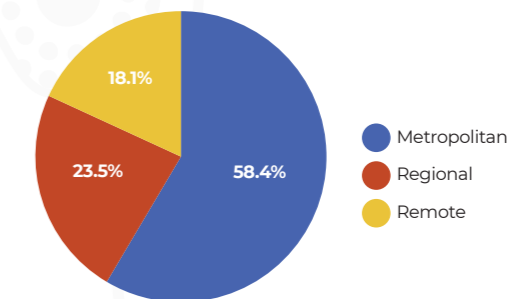
"I have social media on my phone" Female, Karna Plains School

"I always go on social media" Female, Port Lincoln Youth Hub

"Social media is important because it keeps me in contact with my family" Female, Unley High School

"Social media can make you feel worse than what you are, and people can be annoying on Snapchat" Female, Westport Primary School

Social media card selection by region



The Aboriginal children and young people I spoke with can be described as part of the 'social media generation'. They have grown up in a time where technology improves at a rapid pace and requires constant adaptability. They frequently use social media platforms such as Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram to connect with and maintain relationships with family and friends. Some Aboriginal young people told me about the negative effects social media can have on their mental health and self-image.

TOP TEN TOPICS CONT...

10. Country (12.9%)

“Connection to Country is important for your well-being”
Female, Botanic High School

“I’m proud to be Aboriginal. When I lived in Port Lincoln we would go and eat wombat and kangaroo”
Female, Cowandilla Primary School

“Country is important because I love Ernabella”
Female, Ernabella

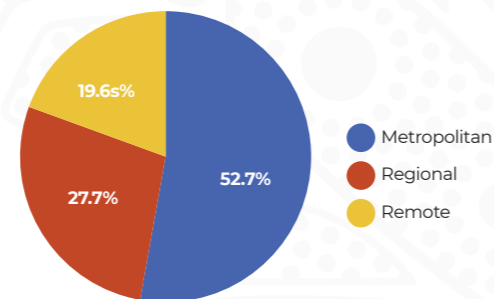
“Country is important. Where I’m from is important to me because my ancestors”
Male, Kurna Plains School

“Country is important, its where you’re from”
Male, Christies Beach High School

“Country is important to me, I miss my country”
Female, Lincoln Gardens Primary School

“Country is important, and we have to look after the land”
Male, Port Lincoln High School

Country card selection by region



Connection to country is a vital aspect of Aboriginal people’s identities, and can be a mechanism for maintaining strong spirits and minds. Aboriginal young people understand the importance of caring for country, knowing where your country is, and the role it plays in connecting them to their families and communities. Lots of Aboriginal young people were living away from their country and had strong desires to return, to spend time with family, and to learn more about their cultures.

CONCLUSION

Aboriginal children and young people must be empowered, supported, and heard. These youth forums have provided me with a deeper understanding of the actions we can undertake to create more supportive, empowering environments to amplify their voices, and to ensure they are provided every opportunity to be immersed in their cultures. Aboriginal young people want their communities to show up and protect their rights.

This report affirms the priorities of Aboriginal young people and will continue to set the tone for future engagement and activity.

Our young people have spoken volumes on what is important to them, what worries them, and what changes they want to see in their communities. I have captured their words to build an understanding of their experiences, being a part of schools and communities, and living in their land of Australia as global citizens.

Our highest priority is ensuring that our children and young people are provided space and support to grow up immersed in their culture and connected to their families and community. As Aboriginal young people expressed, family is where you are loved, safe, and happy. This strong connection to their immediate and extended family and community is critical for their development and their well-being.

We must do more to end and prevent racism. I heard many stories about young people’s lived experiences with racism and discrimination. From race-based bullying in the school, on field racism in team sports, to racial profiling in shopping centres, Aboriginal children and young people are frequently exposed to racial violence.

I heard how detrimental these interactions can be on Aboriginal young people’s mental health. If we value improving mental health, and decreasing the rates of suicide amongst Aboriginal people, we must do more to end racism in all forms.

Aboriginal children deserve every opportunity to express their cultural identity. Young people told me that learning and practising their culture included art, hunting practices, learning about their family and their mob’s history, and learning to look after country. Many young people said culture “is a part of me”, “it’s everything”; this reinforces how integral culture is to the development and overall well-being of our young people.

This is a comprehensive report that captures the voices of Aboriginal children and young people, from across the diverse Aboriginal communities of South Australia. This report will be presented to the Minister for Education, and I hope due to the unique nature of this report, it will be presented before Parliament.

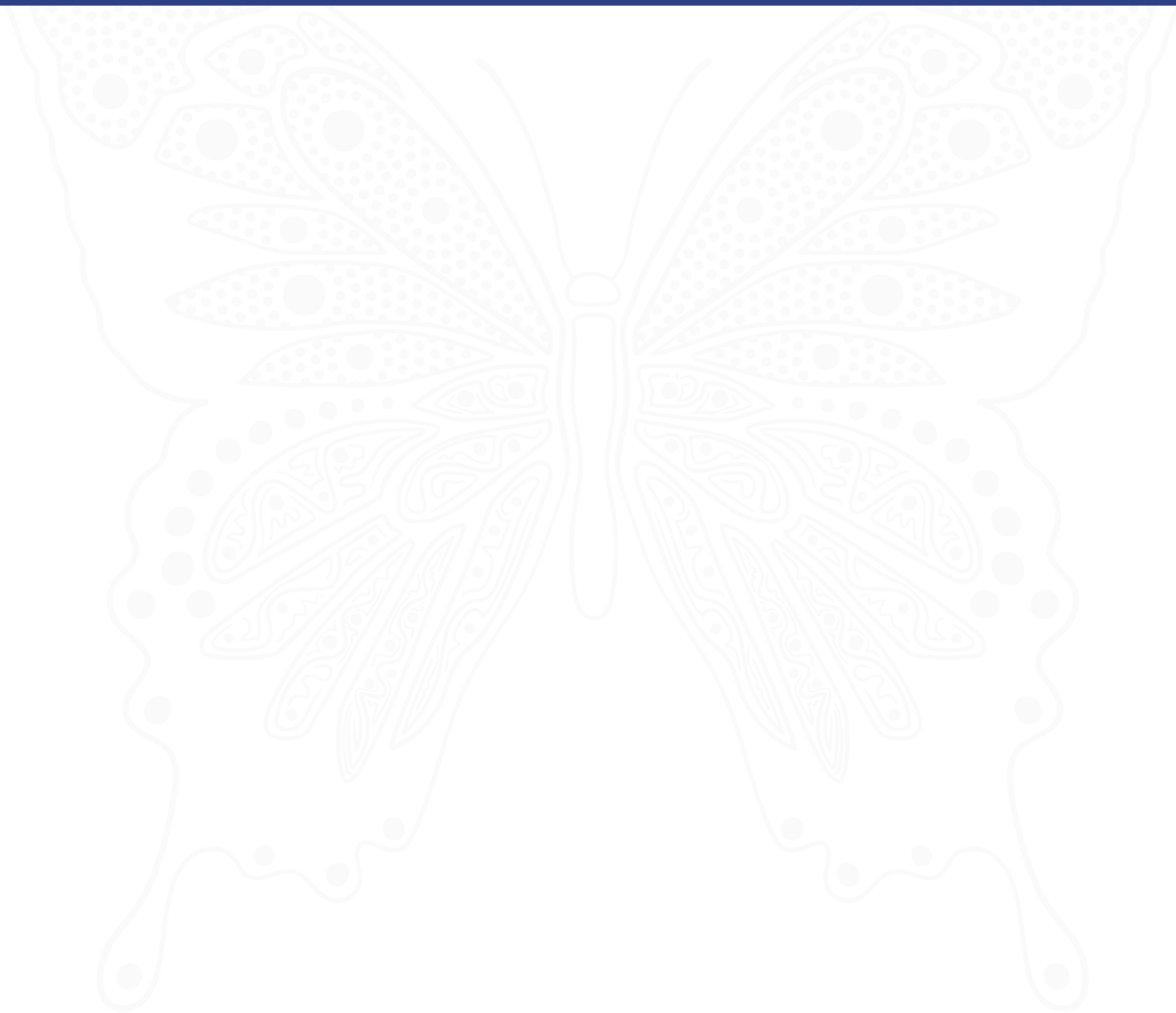
I hope this report has allowed our Aboriginal children and young people to feel free in expressing their views and opinions. I also hope that our Aboriginal communities, government agencies and many others have gained insight into what truly matters to Aboriginal children and young people and understand how we can implement changes to ensure a better future for our next generation that is inclusive, supportive, and compassionate.

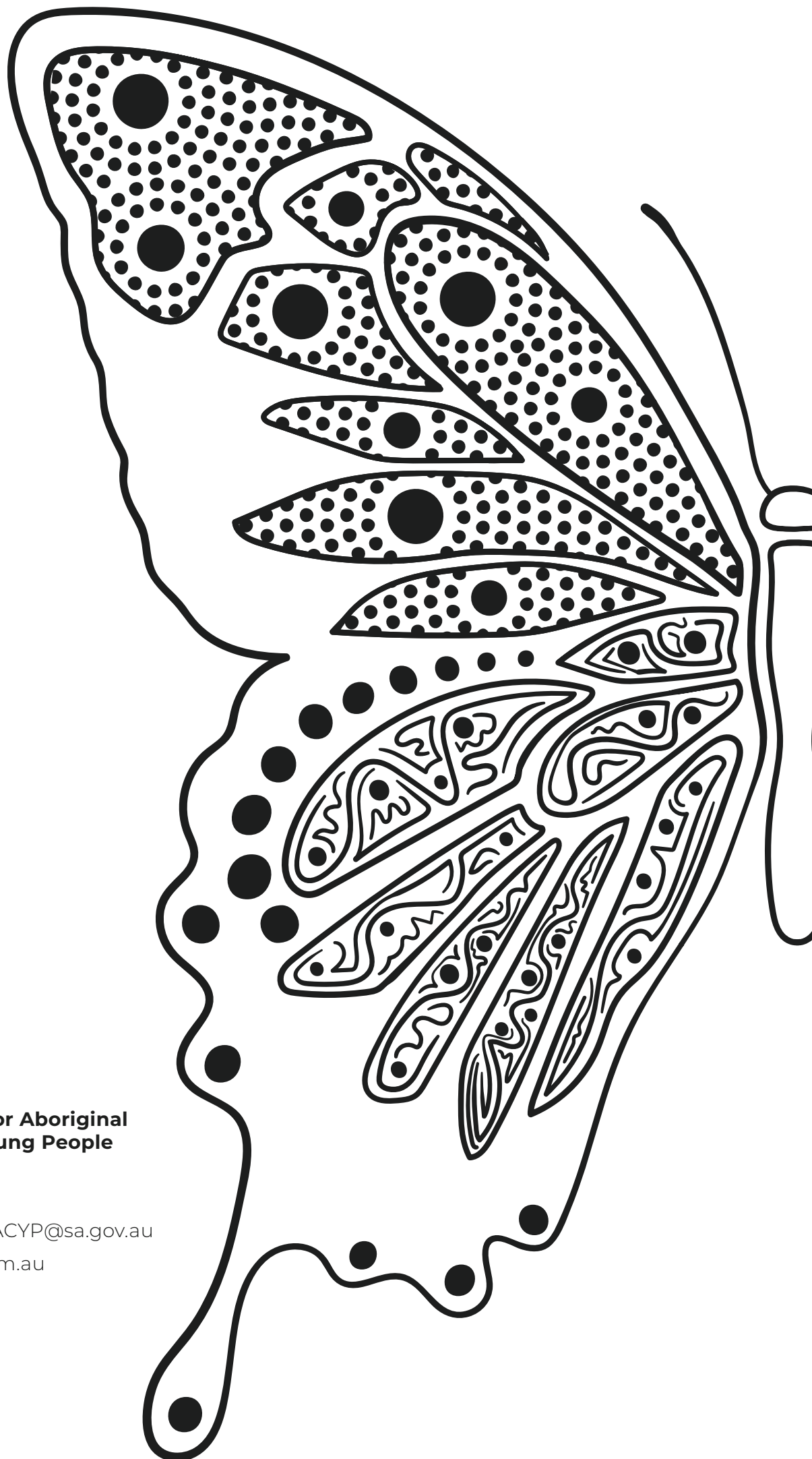
Finally, as reiterated by many Aboriginal young people, we must be conscious not to view Aboriginal children and young people from a deficit perspective. They possess an abundance of knowledge, talent and value as future leaders. Their radical optimism is seen, heard and felt.

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NOTES





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