WALKING TOGETHER TO MAKE THINGS BETTER

ROCKHAMPTON ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUTH FORUM REPORT

This report honours the stories and voices
of the young people who participated in the forum.

DARUMBAL
COMMUNITY YOUTH SERVICE INC.

DARUMBAL COMMUNITY YOUTH SERVICES INC. (DCYSI) RESPECTFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE DARUMBAL PEOPLES AS THE TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND WHERE DCYSI IS SITUATED AND WHERE THE YOUTH FORUM WAS HELD. WE PAY RESPECT TO ELDERS, PAST, PRESENT AND EMERGING.

> ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUNG PEOPLE ARE OUR FUTURE GENERATION, SO WE NEED TO TREAT THEM WITH AS MUCH RESPECT AS THEY TREAT US. IF WE CAN LISTEN TO THEM, AND THEY CAN LEARN FROM US, THEN THEY CAN BE THE NEXT GENERATION TO PAVE THE WAY FOR OUR PEOPLE.
>
> TARRYN CORA, 20

With thanks

We thank the Department of Child Safety Youth and Women for supporting this event and creating the opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Rockhampton to have a walali voice.

We recognise the knowledge, wisdom and commitment of the young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who participated in the Youth Forum. This report honours the stories shared openly and with honesty by a deadly group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders of the future.

Thanks to Leann Wilson who generously gave of her time, support and networks. And to Phillip Brooks, Bidjara, Kairi and Ducabrook descendant and the then Commissioner, Queensland Family and Child Commission, for attending the forum to hear directly from participants about how to improve the services and systems that support them.

A note on language

DCYSI are proud to use Darumbal words as one way we embed cultural pride in all that we do. With permission from Aunty Ethel Speedy, Darumbal Elder and DCYSI Board Member, this report uses the following Darumbal words:

Walali: meaning strong
Yadaba: meaning respect

The Rockhampton Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Forum, and the Forum Report were designed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, accordingly, the use of 'our' and 'us' refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

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FROM THE CEO, DCYSI

I want to share my absolute appreciation for the great success of the inaugural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Forum here in Rockhampton. The outcomes were amazing and I'm really looking forward to furthering our advocacy and leadership roles for young people in our community with the information we have at hand.

After the Forum, I had the privilege of speaking with a number of young people who attended and had mentioned they felt respected and heard; and through this report, I intend to make sure their voice isn't limited to influencing only our services at DCYSI, but also advocating for systemic changes locally and state-wide.

Congratulations to our very first project of the Youth Advisory Group, Chaired by Jasmine Cleland and Vice-Chair Brendan Stanley. What you and your team achieved on top of your daily roles, was nothing short of amazing and clearly demonstrated your collective commitment and dedication to the young people you work with.

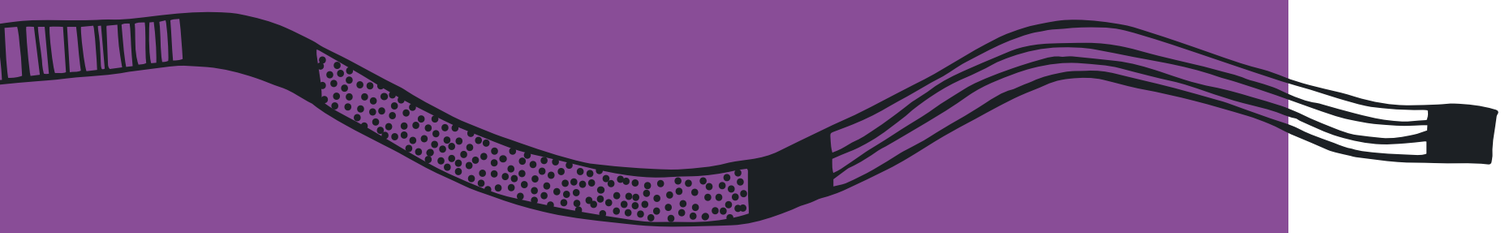
Finally, I would like to thank all young people who participated in the forum. We are most certainly humbled by your fearlessness in being involved and speaking up.

I urge readers of this report to pay attention to what has been reflected from the forum; and to truly understand that we do have an amazing next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people coming through; they are the leaders, parents and Elders of the future.

Listen to their voice, hear their barriers and show them the yadaba they deserve.

Let's walk together, to make things better.

Nyoka Fetoa'i



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IN SEPTEMBER 2019, DCYSI HOSTED THE INAUGURAL ROCKHAMPTON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUTH FORUM (THE FORUM).

The forum brought together 50 deadly young people, aged 8 to 21. The voices captured in this report represent the diversity of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the region.

The Youth Forum gave these young people a platform to share their stories. They talked up about their goals, hopes and interests; the challenges they face and their ideas for change.

The forum was structured around three workshop sessions based on Mal Meninga's leadership model. The workshops were: what matters, the threats and barriers encountered and solutions for the future.

This report presents the participant's stories and experiences on the following topics which emerged as the forum's key themes.

WHAT MATTERS:

- Culture
- Family and friends
- Education and school
- Doing what you love
- Money and a job
- Health and wellbeing

THREATS AND BARRIERS:

- Racism and stereotyping
- Shame
- Feeling alone
- Instability at home
- Getting into trouble
- Sorry business
- Barriers to getting a job
- No yadaba and culture in schools

THE FUTURE

The participants showed great insight in identifying the next steps needed to make things better. Different areas for intervention were identified including actions at individual, school, program, system and community levels.

NEXT STEPS

DCYSI will advocate, work with government and other providers, and where necessary, seek investment and funding to implement the recommendations in this report.

ABOUT THE FORUM

THE INAUGURAL ROCKHAMPTON ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUTH FORUM WAS HELD AT THE DREAMTIME CULTURAL CENTRE ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2019.

What we hoped to achieve:

The goals of the Rockhampton Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Forum were to:

- Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to feel valued, inspired and proud
- Understand what matters to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Rockhampton – their priorities, what problems they want to see solved and their ideas for solutions
- Empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth to have influence over the design and delivery of programs, services and policies that impact young people in Rockhampton
- Inform DCYSI's advocacy and advice

Forum planning and design: DCYSI Youth Advisory Group

The DCYSI Youth Advisory Group independently managed the planning and delivery of the forum. The Youth Advisory Group is made up of 9 DCYSI staff members under 25 years and is lead by an elected Chairperson and Vice-Chair.

The benefit of this approach was twofold:

1. The forum was planned *for* young people *by* young people
2. DCYSI's young leaders had an experiential leadership development opportunity, in a broad range of areas including governance and decision making, teamwork, accountability, event planning and public speaking

The group was supported by senior DCYSI staff and the CEO as needed.

THE YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP DECIDED ON THE THEME FOR THE FORUM **"WALKING TOGETHER TO MAKE THINGS BETTER"**

OVERVIEW OF THE DAY

The lead facilitators for the day were the inspirational:

- **Leann Wilson:** Bidjara, Kara-Kara and South Sea Islander descendent
- **Mal Meninga:** proud patron for his South Sea Islander community and Australian rugby league legend

Supported by:

- **Nyoka Fetoa'i:** CEO, DCYSI and Darumbal woman
- **Jasmine Cleland:** Chair, DCYSI Youth Advisory Group
- **Tarryn Cora:** Darumbal Traditional Owner, young person, Youth Worker and Advisor to The Healing Foundation
- **Bush Tucker Bunji:** (aka Gabriel Willie) Writer, actor and star of Black Comedy
- **Kyel Roberson:** Bachelor of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advocacy, Community and Music Therapy Program developer and deadly musician

Forum opening

The Forum was opened with a Welcome to Country by two young Darumbal people. The DCYSI Youth Advisory Group Chair, Jasmine Cleland then introduced the forum and led an activity to connect the group to each other and to culture.

After this, Nyoka Fetoa'i requested all adults leave the room to create a safe space for the young people to talk with her about the meaning and value of advocacy and why their voices are so important to DCYSI and the community. Nyoka encouraged everyone to speak up openly and with no fear.

After this closed session, Leann Wilson set a tone of openness and putting culture first by speaking of her own cultural practices and family connections. She generously shared the meaning and significance of her grandmother's yarning stick.

Leann followed this with an activity that demonstrated the importance of 60,000 years of wisdom and connection, compared to only 250 short years since colonisation and cultural disruption. The activity reminded participants of the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and practices that sustained us and Country for thousands of years. It also highlighted the resilience and strength it has taken to survive and thrive since that time. Leann encouraged participants to reclaim, revitalise and restore *our ways*.

Workshops

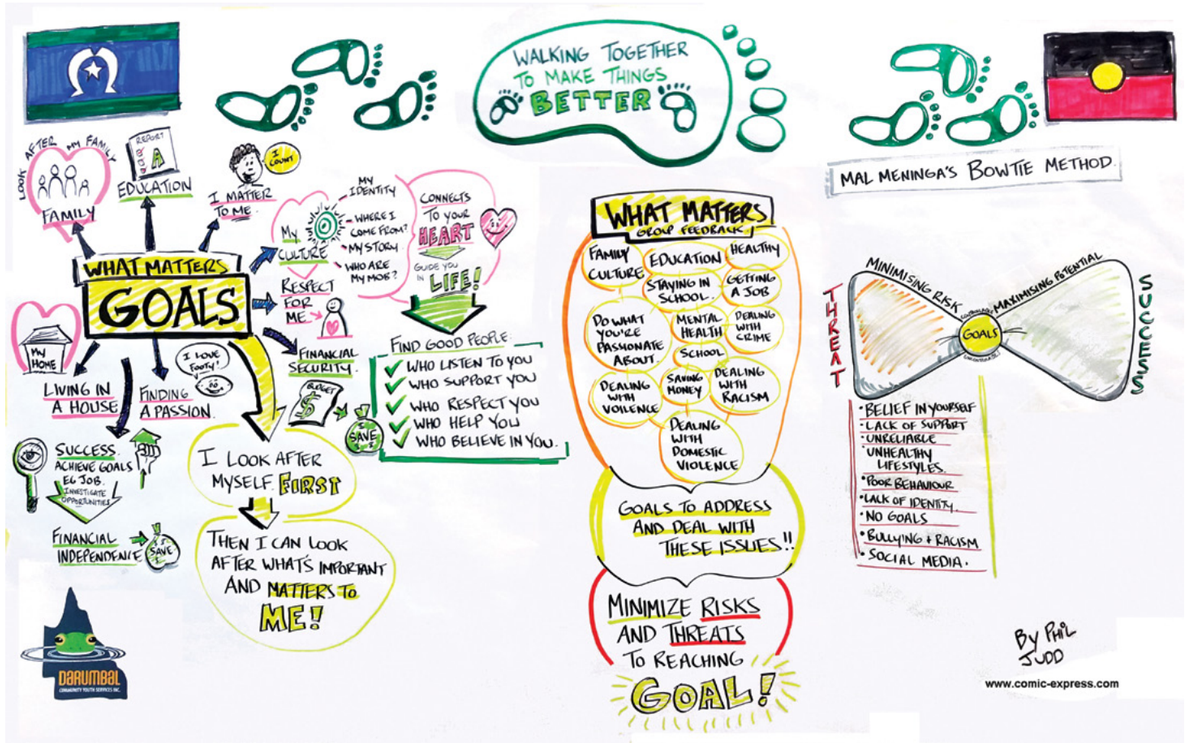
The forum was structured around three workshop sessions based on Mal Meninga's Model of Leadership Development, *The Bow Tie* ©. The workshop sessions included small group work, followed by a report back and large group discussions.

One group explored the topics through music with Kyel Roberson of Strings Attached Services.

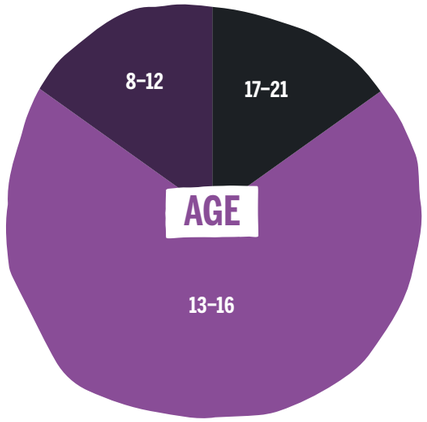
Attendance was supported by teachers, school staff and youth workers from schools and groups in Rockhampton. Together, support staff and young people scribed the conversations from the small group sessions.

Phil Judd of Comic Express graphically recorded the discussions in real time.

Mal Meninga's Model of Leadership—The Bow Tie©



WHO TOOK PART IN THE CONVERSATION?



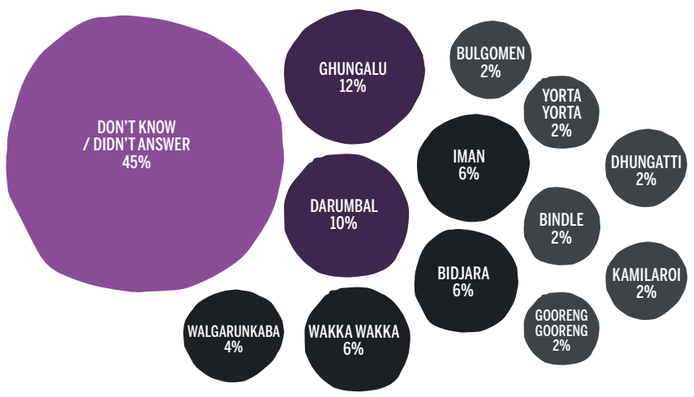
The forum brought together **50 deadly young people, aged 8 to 21.** The voices captured in this report represent a diverse range of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the region.

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people from Rockhampton were invited to attend. Additional efforts were made to encourage participation by young people who aren't usually given the opportunity to participate in forums like this, including those who are disengaged from mainstream schooling and involved in the Youth Justice System.

SCHOOLS AND GROUPS REPRESENTED AT THE FORUM

The participants were invited to attend through schools, alternative learning centres, community organisations supporting youth and Youth Justice Services.

PARTICIPANT'S MOBS



FORUM EVALUATION

To evaluate the success of the Youth Forum and improve future forums, participants were invited to complete a feedback form including demographic questions and five evaluation questions.

- 62% OF PARTICIPANTS COMPLETED AN EVALUATION FORM
- 100% OF RESPONDENTS FELT THEIR IDEAS WERE LISTENED TO
- 100% OF RESPONDENTS FELT THAT THE FORUM WOULD HELP MAKE CHANGE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
- 96% RATED THE OVERALL DAY AS EXCELLENT

WHAT DID YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT TODAY?

When asked what participants liked best about the day they commented on the facilitators, particularly Mal Meninga and Bush Tucker Bunji. The song writing workshop, facilitated by Kyel Roberson received multiple mentions and several participants talked about the positive aspects of the workshops with feedback such as:

The evaluation responses highlighted a range of different perspectives on what the best part of the day was. Young people's comments included:

- Meeting new people
- Sharing thoughts
- Being listened to
- Hearing people's stories
- Learning about everyone's issues
- Learning new things and meeting new people
- The support with answering my questions

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

While the majority of respondents indicated that nothing could be improved, a few did provide comments that will help improve the future forums, including:

PEOPLE LISTENING
MORE PEOPLE TALKING UP
ME SPEAKING UP
MORE PEOPLE IN GRADE 10,11 & 12
SPEAKING UP MORE

A SWOT ANALYSIS WAS ALSO CONDUCTED BY THE DCYSI YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP

WHAT MATTERS

CULTURE

When asked **'what matters to you?'** culture was among the first topic raised in every group. Participants spoke passionately about wanting to learn more about culture. Comments from participants included:

- It's important to know your history and where you come from to get connection and belonging
- Understanding and learning about my culture makes me feel proud
- I just want to learn more about my culture especially my language

Most participants reported that their culture and being black, was a source of strength, resilience, connection and pride.

In contrast to the pride young people felt in their culture many didn't feel a strong connection to their country and cultural practices and connections. When the group participated in an activity to explore **'Who's your Mob?' 45% of participants responded with the name of the town they live in or didn't respond at all.**

Some participants identified their disconnection as being the result of their parent's experiences of family dysfunction and racism. However many focused on talking about the positive impact of instances where culture was experienced and taught.

There was extensive discussion about the importance of participating in cultural programs and events like NAIDOC and the happiness these opportunities brought. However this was often followed by examples where schools had stopped supporting opportunities to celebrate culture and had removed culturally safe places, supports and practices in schools.

"CULTURE CONNECTS TO YOUR HEART AND GUIDES YOU IN LIFE"

"I'M BLACK AND I'M PROUD. I'M PROUD TO BE INDIGENOUS"

WHO WE ARE

At the forum one group of young people participated in a song writing workshop.

The group wrote this song which was set to music by Kyel Roberson:

Who we are, who we are, who we are

From all the mobs and tribes from Australia

We stand up as one, one, one

Together being proud and strong

RAP Break...

DARUMBAL
GHUNGALU
IMAN
BINDAL
GOORENG GOORENG
WADJA WADJA
BWGGCOLMAN
TORRES STRAITS / BOIGU
WAKKA WAKKA

FAMILY AND FRIENDS: BEING CONNECTED AND SAFE

When talking about what matters most, participants identified relationships with family and friends as a high priority. The word relationships was repeated in all groups, demonstrating the importance placed on feeling connected.

WHAT MATTERS IS FOR MY MOTHER TO BE PROUD OF ME

Multiple participants said they wanted safe and stable homes:

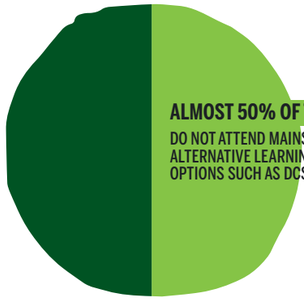
- Wanting a safe place, a roof over my head, somewhere to sleep and stay clean
- I want stability at home. Stability matters to me

While it was clearly stated in all groups that family mattered, some young people reported concerns about the stability and safety of their homes due to Domestic Violence and alcohol and drug use. For others, they wanted more support with homework and financial assistance.

EDUCATION AND SCHOOL

Participants talked about the importance of attending school and getting an education. Their reasons included social connection, future jobs and an understanding that finishing school is important:

- An education matters, to get a job, to learn and have guidance for the future
- Finishing school matters
- At school I have a community and mates



ALMOST 50% OF THE ATTENDEES

DO NOT ATTEND MAINSTREAM SCHOOLING, AND INSTEAD ACCESS ALTERNATIVE LEARNING SPACES AND FLEXIBLE LEARNING OPTIONS SUCH AS DCSYI ALS, CARINITY AND EDMUND RICE.

Many participants felt their efforts to stay positively engaged in education were not supported by teachers, staff and the schooling system.

MONEY AND A JOB

Participants spoke extensively about the importance of making 'good money' in the future. The discussion on jobs was equally focused between generating a good income and career satisfaction.

For many the focus on earning good money was in response to feeling the effects of poverty within their families, describing experiences such as:

- Stealing for family because things are too expensive
- Not having enough money for stuff you need
- No money is a barrier to sport - not having the right equipment for example can't afford footy boots
- Can't afford tickets to get a job which is $215 – my family would never be able to come up with that kind of money
- Not enough money to pay for stuff you need for jobs

Not understanding how to begin saving was also seen as a barrier to financial stability. The participants talked about the need to know how to open a savings account and manage their money effectively.

Many participants hope for a better future. They have clear career goals and a plan to work towards them:

"SMALL THINGS TO COME FIRST. BIG THINGS WILL COME LATER"

"GET INTO THE DEFENCE FORCE

DO MY TESTING FOR A FITTER AND TURNER APPRENTICESHIP

START MY OWN BUSINESS IN BAKING

MY GOAL IS TO BECOME A PHOTOGRAPHER

I WANT TO BE A YOUTUBER AND PROFESSIONAL GAMER – TO GET THERE I NEED SET GOALS AND BE MENTALLY IN THE RIGHT PLACE"

DOING WHAT YOU LOVE

Participants could see the positive impacts of being able to do what they love, including relaxation, staying out of trouble and increasing school engagement:

- I go to school when I know I will get to work on engines. I want to be a mechanic
- Gaming gives me personal time to get away from everything
- Gaming, social media, movies and music stop drugs, violence and us walking the streets

Participants articulated the benefits of gaming such as; staying out of trouble and preparation for tech jobs of the future. However it was observed that some adults in supervisory roles did not see the positive impacts of gaming and expressed preconceived ideas of gaming as a negative influence on young people's lives.

Participants also mentioned fishing, sports and cooking as pastimes they loved.

> **"WHAT MATTERS IS FREEDOM TO DO WHAT WE LOVE: WORKING ON CARS, DANCING AND GAMING. WE WANT TO BE MECHANICS, DANCERS, AND PROFESSIONAL GAMERS."**

GAMING WAS MENTIONED BY SEVERAL PARTICIPANTS AS A POSITIVE PASTIME

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Participants reported that having good mental and physical health was something that mattered to them. This was talked about and understood by participants in a number of different ways:

WHAT MATTERS IS ME: MY MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

PERSONAL WELLBEING

HEALTH: FEEL GOOD SO YOU DON'T DIE EARLY

IT'S IMPORTANT TO ME FOR MY HEALTH TO REST AND PLAY SPORTS

EMOTIONS MATTER, HAVING A GOOD HEADSPACE TO FOCUS AND HAVING BALANCE

HEALTH MATTERS, FOOTY, SPORT, DANCING, NETBALL AND BASKETBALL

While health and wellbeing were identified as something that matters, there was almost no discussion about barriers to good health. Sport, rest, visiting a counsellor, wanting to give up drugs and alcohol and regular health checks with GP were all raised as ideas to stay healthy.

THREATS AND ISSUES

WHILE ALL YOUNG PEOPLE FACE CHALLENGES, FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUNG PEOPLE IN ROCKHAMPTON EXPERIENCES OF RACISM, STEREOTYPING, FEELINGS OF SHAME AND NOT FEELING SUPPORTED ARE COMMON, PERVASIVE AND AMPLIFY EVERY OTHER BARRIER THEY ENCOUNTER.

IT IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT THESE CHALLENGES ARE UNIQUE TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUNG PEOPLE AND THAT IS WHY UNIQUE SOLUTIONS ARE REQUIRED.

"RACISM IT HAPPENS AT SCHOOL, IT HAPPENS EVERYWHERE"

RACISM AND STEREOTYPING

Experiences of racism, discrimination and negative stereotypes constantly affect these young people at school, in the shopping centre and in their day to day life. Stories and examples shared included:

- dirty looks, being made fun of because of my colour and name calling
- entering a Police Station and hearing "another black kid in here"
- being bashed at school and told it was only because I'm black
- was told by a total stranger that I'm too fair skinned to be Aboriginal so I shouldn't wear an Aboriginal shirt
- being followed and watched by shopkeepers, and one even mumbling under their breath about wanting to ban black people so I could hear
- being targeted at Stockland by security guards and being watched and followed in shops

The participants talked about how young people in schools had developed racist attitudes from young ages. Many young people also felt racist attitudes were widely held in the community. One participant commented:

- They get it from their parents – monkey see, monkey do

Social media

There was extensive discussion about social media being used for bullying and racism. This was experienced by a large majority of participants and in one workshop session, every participant in the group of approximately ten had been involved in fights fueled by racism on social media.

SHAME

Participants talked about shame being the result of two factors, a cultural concept of not wanting to feel embarrassed or 'big note themselves', but most significantly a lack of respect for them, their actions and their voices:

"WE GET SHAME TO TALK UP BECAUSE WE GET SHUT DOWN"

Participants reported that 'shame' was disempowering and a barrier to seeking help and taking up opportunities.

Overcoming shame for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people relies heavily on cultivating a two-way respect between Indigenous people, teachers, other adults and the community. **The shame cycle must be broken so young Indigenous people can speak up and be empowered to take opportunities presented to them.**

At the conclusion of the forum, the participants were asked to reflect on what was the best part about the day and what could have been improved. An overwhelming response for improvement was the need for participants themselves to speak up more and "not be shame".

FEELING ALONE

Some participants expressed feelings of being let down and unsupported by adults in their lives including teachers and family members. Participants said they felt alone and didn't get the same support from key adults that 'other kids' got such as teachers who 'have their backs' and emotional and financial support from family.

FEELING UNSUPPORTED AT SCHOOL

Participants made it clear that they are committed to succeeding in school and education. Schools should be supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in this but based on participant's feedback, too often, this is not the case.

Young people said that the threats they face in schools include a combination of feeling unsupported by teachers and school staff, racism and shame. This was demonstrated through the following experiences shared by participants:

- School not doing anything about racism and bullying so you retaliate, fight and get suspended
- I was accused of stealing, told to kill myself, was bullied for being black. Told the teachers but they didn't do anything. So I bashed her

Most concerning about these examples is the punishment and suspensions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who felt they had no choice but to 'take matters into their own hands'. Participants were able to clearly describe how this vicious cycle only serves to further disengage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from school and education.

Good teachers and staff make a difference

Participants reported the significant difference that is made by a good teacher who knows how to deal with and address racism, sharing the following example:

"WE HAD ONE TEACHER WHO WOULDN'T JUST GIVE DETENTION TO KIDS WHO HAD BEEN RACIST. SHE SAID THAT WOULD ONLY MAKE THEM HATE US MORE AND WOULD NEVER CHANGE ATTITUDES. INSTEAD SHE WOULD MAKE US ALL SIT DOWN TOGETHER AND TALK ABOUT WHY IT HAPPENED AND HOW IT MADE US FEEL. IT DIDN'T ALWAYS WORK BUT SOMETIMES IT DID. DEFINITELY BETTER THAN DETENTION WHERE NOTHING CHANGED AND SOMETIMES IT REALLY DID MAKE IT WORSE."

FEELING UNSUPPORTED AT HOME: EMOTIONALLY AND FINANCIALLY

- No family support because of the drugs and other problems
- No one in family supports you and they put you down

Many participants provided examples where a lack of family and/or financial support led to missed opportunities and being unable to participate in some education, employment and sporting activities.

- Family can't help me with money to get my tickets for a job - everything you want to do gets crushed
- money needed to get a job or footy boots – other kids just get it from their families – we'll never have that much money

INSTABILITY AT HOME

A consistent theme raised was the lack of stability and support due to the prevalence of substance abuse and violence within some families and the community. Participants spoke of:

DRUG USE AND ALCOHOLISM LEADING TO LITTLE FAMILY SUPPORT

POLICE BECOMING INVOLVED CONSISTENTLY IN HOME LIFE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CREATING AN UNSAFE HOME LIFE RESULTING IN COUCH SURFING AND BEING HOMELESS AND THEN ONTO CRIME

Family fights and family moving away were also raised as issues that contributed to family instability within the home.

NO YADABA AND CULTURE IN SCHOOLS

Participants expressed frustration that many teachers and staff in schools showed very limited understanding of the cultural issues faced such as sorry business, racism and needing culturally safe places where they could 'just be themselves without others looking and judging'. Participants saw CECs in schools as playing a significant role in minimising the impact of these challenges.

> EVIDENCE SHOWS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUNG PEOPLE TO THRIVE IN SCHOOLING THERE MUST BE MORE CULTURALLY INFORMED SUPPORTS AND CULTURALLY SAFE PLACES IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.

However these supports and places being removed from schools was a common theme raised throughout the youth forum.

- Teachers to have more respect for students
- Some teachers are racist
- Teachers not understanding Murri students
- Lack of support at school
- Not enough CECs
- Got into trouble for spending time with CEC
- Not celebrating culture in schools, don't even celebrate NAIDOC

To help them reach their full academic potential, participants wanted supports with homework, time management, assignments and exams, community and group study sessions and more Indigenous tutors.

SORRY BUSINESS

Sorry business was raised as something that affected participants' lives. They also spoke about employers, schools and the broader community not understanding what it meant or why it occurred so often.

The participants held a deep understanding that sorry business is a part of their lives as young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Participants were frustrated that their cultural obligation to take the time needed to go through grieving with their mob wasn't more broadly understood and accepted.

GETTING INTO TROUBLE

There was extensive discussion about the importance of 'staying out of trouble' because it's a threat to many of the things that matter to them. Participants spoke about two main aspects of this threat. Firstly, the importance of knowing your rights and secondly, an awareness that getting into trouble distracts from education and can have longer term consequences, particularly on future employment.

- There's drugs and violence and young people don't know their rights
- Learning your rights helps you keep out of trouble
- When partying with friends I'm not focused on school
- Having an old Police record can stop you getting a job

BARRIERS TO GETTING A JOB

Getting a job is a significant priority for most participants but many of them felt discouraged by the range of barriers they face. Racism and shame were the broader issues impacting the likelihood of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples getting a job. This was in addition to other specific challenges encountered, including:

NOT SURE OF WHAT TO DO TO APPLY, CAN'T GET A LICENSE, TROUBLE GETTING QUALIFICATIONS AND NO WIFI

MONEY IS OFTEN NEEDED TO GET JOB AND I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS OF APPLYING BECAUSE I HAVE TROUBLE WITH READING AND WRITING

THE FUTURE

THE PARTICIPANTS SPOKE UP AND SHOWED GREAT INSIGHT IN IDENTIFYING THE NEXT STEPS NEEDED TO MAKE THINGS BETTER. DIFFERENT AREAS FOR INTERVENTION WERE IDENTIFIED BY THE PARTICIPANTS INCLUDING ACTIONS AT INDIVIDUAL, SCHOOL, PROGRAM, SYSTEM AND COMMUNITY LEVELS.

THE SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY THE FORUM PARTICIPANTS ARE INSIGHTFUL, INTERCONNECTED AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE THREATS THEY FACE ARE COMPLEX. **MOST IMPORTANTLY, THEIR IDEAS ARE PRACTICAL, COST EFFECTIVE AND IMPACTFUL.**

NYOKA FETOA'I, CEO, DCYSI

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

It is significant that many of the solutions proposed by the group were predominantly related to their own behaviours and a willingness to take responsibility for change.

Some of the participants said:

- I just need to make better choices and new friends
- I need to stop the negativity and self-doubt and wrong 'mindframe'. I'll set goals and start a good routine
- It's about me and self-responsibility. I just need to ignore the haters

While this sense of self-responsibility is commendable and their strong sense of resilience should be supported and encouraged, the issues Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people face are not going to change soley by them 'making better choices'. The participant's suggestion to 'just be strong' in the face of racism isn't the solution. Change is needed in the systems, institutions and societal attitudes that continue to fail them.

ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

Becoming a mentor and role model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people will support them to achieve more positive outcomes in school, the workplace, and their communities.

Participants want access to positive role models and mentors. They want to be exposed to new ideas, information and inspiration. Participants also want to hear from motivational speakers and be empowered to create their own future.

Participants at the forum spoke about the importance of role models and mentors and it being inspirational to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in leadership roles, with one example given about being inspired by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander security guard.

Evidence shows for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, positive role models and mentors promote a sense of empowerment and a more positive vision of themselves and their futures.

A CALL OUT TO MAKE THINGS BETTER

Additional areas for action identified, by participants, included ideas for new programs and creating more opportunities to have a voice and develop youth-led solutions.

> THESE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE A CALL FOR CHANGE TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AND BROADER COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS, SUPPORT SERVICES AND THE GOVERNMENT.

These recommendations were developed by the young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are living the reality of these issues in their daily lives. They are best placed to know what solutions will work for them.

TO THE ROCKHAMPTON COMMUNITY...

WE NEED TO START THE GENERATION OF PEOPLE STOPPING THE STEREOTYPES AND SEEING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE FOR WHO WE ARE. WE SEE THAT THROUGH THESE KIDS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS FORUM, THEY ARE MUCH MORE THAN WHAT A STEREOTYPE IS.

THEY HAVE SO MUCH WARMTH AND THEY JUST NEED TO SHINE BECAUSE THEY ARE ALL SHINING STARS AND THEY JUST NEED TO SET THEIR STAR ALIGHT.

TARRYN CORA, 20

RECOMMENDATION 1:
EXPECT THE BEST FROM ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUNG PEOPLE

Believing in and wanting the best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people can create a transformational shift in how they are treated and ultimately how they see themselves in the world. Expectations are more than just words - they influence social norms and impact behaviours and decision-making.

These young people expressed a strong understanding of the impact negative expectations have on them. Believe in them and accept the complexity of the threats they face based on the stories they shared in this report.

Acknowledge their willingness to take responsibility, give them a chance and expect the best from resilient and courageous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

RECOMMENDATION 2:
STOP THE RACISM

TO GOVERNMENT: INVEST IN AN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUTH-LED SOLUTION:

To help the community stamp out racism, the forum participants want to develop a local Rockhampton social media filter that prompts users to re-consider posting if racist sentiment is detected in a post. It will prompt them to stop and think about what they are actually saying and the impact it carries. It is recommended funding be provided to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to develop a place-based technology solution to stop online racism and a campaign to promote the filter and the impacts of racism.

"YOUNG PEOPLE LEADING THIS SOLUTION HAS MANY BENEFITS INCLUDING REDUCING RACISM AND EXPOSING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE SKILLS NEEDED FOR JOBS OF THE FUTURE."

Racism has serious consequences for the people who experience it. For the participants of this forum, it shatters their confidence and sense of worth and undermines every aspect of a positive life including school, employment and their right to be connected to culture. Racism locks these young people out of social and economic opportunities, entrenching disadvantage into their personal narratives.

TO THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY...

RECOMMENDATION 3:
SHARE AND TEACH CULTURE

TO GOVERNMENT: INVEST IN ASSISTING YOUNG ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR FAMILY HISTORIES AND CULTURAL HERITAGE.

Invest in and support early access cultural and kinship mapping prior to child safety intervention.

Evidence affirms that continuity of cultural identity is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, yet almost half of the participants weren't able to identify who their mob was. There are a number of sources to help young people learn more about their family and cultural histories but in many instances support is required to access and navigate these resources.

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experiences intervention by Child Safety, support is given to explore kinship and cultural connections. This recommendation calls for that support to be given earlier. Connection to culture is a protective factor and finding this information out earlier may help strengthen families and mitigate the need for interventions.

FINDING OUT YOUR CULTURAL AND FAMILY HISTORY ONCE CHILD SAFETY IS INVOLVED IS TOO LATE.

Passing on knowledge to young people about pride and respect in kinship networks, family history, bush tucker, ceremony, language and connection to Country fosters a strong sense of identity for young people.

If you have cultural knowledge you are willing and able to share with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, find opportunities to instil this knowledge in the next generation.

Learning more about their culture is a major priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Many families have had their cultural knowledge disrupted by colonisation, government policy and racism.

Evidence shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have a strong sense of cultural identity experience better health and socio-emotional outcomes later in life. A strong cultural identity acts as a protective barrier to many of the challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people face in life.

Please call DCYSI on (07) 4922 6180 to discuss opportunities to share your cultural wisdoms with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

RECOMMENDATION 4:
BE MENTORS AND ROLE MODELS

Say yes to opportunities to mentor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and be a present, positive and visible role model for young people.

Participants at this forum, along with a number of other surveys of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth tell us they value the positive representation of Indigenous role models as it builds a sense of pride in being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

The consistent, enduring presence of a caring adult in a young person's life can be the difference between staying in school or dropping out, making healthy decisions or engaging in risky behaviours and realising potential or failing to achieve life dreams.

Your investment as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentor and role model will enhance Indigenous pride for our young people. Further, is also a powerful way of strengthening community bonds and togetherness by encouraging connection for young people with their community.

DCYSI's Walali Bili Program is just one way for you to mentor an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young person. Walali Bili is seeking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people from having further contact with the youth justice system. Contact DCYSI to express your interest.

TO SCHOOLS...

RECOMMENDATION 5:
LISTEN TO, RESPECT AND BE GUIDED BY ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS AND THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY

For schools to be inclusive, responsive and respectful of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at every stage of their learning and development journey, they must listen to, respect and be guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community:

Listen to young people

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's voices must be at the centre of and guide any efforts to improve educational outcomes. This report provides some insight into current experiences however it only scratches the surface in terms of education. Schools must create ongoing and meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to have a voice.

Listen to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

Evidence tells us high levels of community involvement in the planning and delivery of school processes, priorities and curriculum, improves outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Schools in Rockhampton should engage with and support projects being developed by the Rockhampton Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Meetings, Education Working Group. This working group, Co-Chaired by Dr Melinda Mann and two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, is made up of a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members who are dedicated to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Rockhampton.

Engaging with this group and listening to community-led solutions will lead to the empowerment and self-determination of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to shape a better, more inclusive education system supported by strong connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers and the community.

RECOMMENDATION 6:
MORE YADABA IN SCHOOLS

Schools must work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the community to develop partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and work with them to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have access to culture, languages, values and histories as part of their school experience.

Schools must respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and support young people to celebrate their culture and identity as part of their learning journey.

Put simply by one forum participant: "School needs to understand that we need more culture at school" – this statement is backed by evidence. Studies show that institutional practices that support and celebrate traditional Indigenous cultures in the educational system contribute to improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Culture and community play an important role in shaping young people's lives.

"SCHOOL NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND THAT WE NEED MORE CULTURE AT SCHOOL"

RECOMMENDATION 7:
BUILD CAPABILITY TO RESPOND TO AND ADDRESS RACISM

Participants feel teachers and staff are not adequately responding to and addressing racism in schools and in some instances participants felt that the teachers themselves demonstrated racist behaviours.

A positive school culture that encourages care and safety among students and staff is critical to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Schools must develop clear processes for responding to and dealing with racism. Teachers and staff should be trained in how best to take a stance against racism and how best to bring about change in racist beliefs and behaviours.

RECOMMENDATION 8:
GREATER SUPPORT FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people want access to additional supports to help them achieve academic success this includes support with assignments and exam preparation.

Programs such as ARTIE and AIME are enjoyed but the young people want more regular, ongoing and academically focused supports including time management and study skills.

Members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community fondly remember the "ASPA Days". ASPA was a program that is widely supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members. It's format, approach and outcomes should be re-considered in the current context.

TO THE SERVICES THAT SUPPORT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FAMILIES...

RECOMMENDATION 9:
SUPPORT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FAMILIES TO PROVIDE SAFE AND STABLE HOMES

Participants spoke strongly about the impacts of past experiences on themselves and their families. To build the capacity of our families to nurture and support their children we recommend they are provided with family support services which are trauma informed, healing-centred, holistic and culturally responsive are accountable to our families and community.

All providers of family support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including mainstream service providers, should be connected and accountable to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
Family support providers should engage with opportunities for community collaboration and connection in the best interest of young people and their families.

TO THE GOVERNMENT...

RECOMMENDATION 10:
PROVIDE FLEXIBLE FUNDING WITH DECISION MADE AT A LOCAL LEVEL – SMALL INVESTMENT EQUALS BIG CHANGE

This recommendation seeks flexible, small investment in a child's wellbeing needs to be made available through a streamlined, easily accessible funding pool with a single coordinated application touchpoint.

Due to pervasive poverty and marginalisation of their parents, our young people don't feel like they can access small amounts of support that they felt were often available to other young people with working familes.

Another financial barrier noted was the inability to play sport due to registrations fees and purchase of equipment.

Providing minor financial supports with decisions made locally at an early intervention point is a more cost effective option than the higher costs associated during more intensive types of support and intervention.

While a range of small grants are available they are siloed, inaccessible and hard to apply for and navigate. Particularly for a young person who is taking the lead.

IDEAS FOR NEW PROGRAMS

RECOMMENDATION 11:
DEVELOP AND SEEK INVESTMENT TO DELIVER A PROGRAM *FOR* ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUTH DESIGNED *BY* YOUNG PEOPLE, THAT BUILDS THEIR CONFIDENCE TO SPEAK UP, KNOW THEIR RIGHTS AND LEARN ABOUT CONTEMPORARY TOPICS IMPORTANT TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

Young people want to be educated, empowered and confident to use their voice. DCYSI will work with young people to develop a program which educates, empowers and builds their confidence to speak up about topics that matter to them.

The program may include a component focused on building public speaking skills for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Having the ability to confidently organise and express their ideas will empower these young people to overcome shame, speak up and have a voice.

DCYSI will also develop the program to build young people's knowledge around techniques for advocacy and young people's rights. This includes knowledge about contemporary topics important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people such as; native title, healing, lateral violence, cultural safety, self-determination and the Uluru statement.

MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO HAVE A VOICE

RECOMMENDATION 12:
ANNUAL YOUTH FORUM

TO GOVERNMENT: YADABA THE WALALI VOICE OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUNG PEOPLE

Firstly, make the DCYSI Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Forum an annual event. DCYSI will continue to advocate for more opportunities to empower young people to speak up and use their voice.

And further, provide funding for a broad range of youth forums. Create meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to exercise their voices, be heard and influence the decisions that impact them. But most importantly, act on their wisdom, advice and recommendations. Show them that they matter and that their voices matter.

NEXT STEPS

DCYSI will advocate, work with Government and other providers and where necessary, seek investment and funding to implement the recommendations outlined in this report.

We call on the whole community to join with us in demonstrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have the power to change the systems that hold them back.

DCYSI urges the community, government and other service providers to listen to the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and make the changes needed. Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Rockhampton should be able to expect a future full of hope, promise and potential that is free from racism, shame and bullying.

Let's work together to ensure their interests remain paramount, nurture their self-belief and support them as the next generation to pave the way for our people.

APPENDIX 1

CONTRIBUTORS

DCYSI wishes to thank and acknowledge the following contributors to the forum and the report:

The facilitation

The facilitation was led by Mal Meniga and Leann Wilson of Regional Economic Solutions.

RES is dedicated to bridging the economic and social gap between Indigenous Australians and the rest of the community. RES facilitates collaboration between the resources sector, government and Indigenous Australians to produce social and economic outcomes that are sustainable, ethical and responsible.

The report

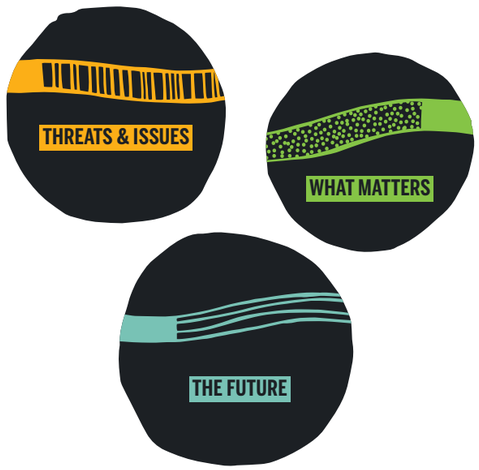
This report was prepared by Whichway Consulting and Professional Services and Zhanae Conway-Dodd, Ghungalu and Birri Birri woman, journalist and youth worker.

Whichway provides critical analysis and communications services that honour and share a genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community voice to create reciprocal understandings and impactful collaborations that work.

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

The artwork and graphic design in this report are by Keisha Thomason of Leon Design. Keisha is an Aboriginal Graphic Designer and Artist. Keisha is a proud Waanyi-Kalkadoon and Chinese woman. Keisha creates a visual story that is driven by culture and the modern world, connecting people, and helping create the narrative for the future.

The artwork reflects the pathways that we walk together. Each part of the journey is split into the key stages of the forum and the report:



The artwork's key messages include giving voice to and reflecting the sentiments of the young people, and their ideas of creating a better future, and walking together to create a positive future for the next generation. Each stage combined makes up the pathways we take in our life.