



This Is Me

Aboriginal young people's stories



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA acknowledges the unique contribution of Aboriginal people's culture and heritage to Western Australian society.

For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises those of Torres Strait Islander descent. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, though similarities do exist.

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From the Commissioner



In 2014, I asked WA Aboriginal children and young people to tell me about what is important to them and their hopes and dreams for the future.

More than 1,200 children and young people had a say and my office wrote two reports that outline their views and what we can do to support them.

One of the things children and young people told us is that having support, role models and people who they can look up to is important to them.

While there are many different people in the community who provide support, often it's young people themselves who are the most inspiring role models.

In our discussions across the state we heard lots of stories about young Aboriginal people who are working hard to build healthy and happy lives, and making positive contributions to their families and local communities.

This report highlights just a small handful of those stories, which I hope will inspire other Aboriginal children and young people to keep working towards their goals and realise the remarkable potential they have.

Thank you to all of the young people who allowed us to speak with them about their personal story, and to the organisations that made this report possible.

Jenni Perkins

Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People WA

The importance of a nurturing home

Tiegan, 17, Mandurah

Family. It's the most important thing to me. I really wouldn't know what to do without them.

I come from a very caring and loving home. I feel lucky because a lot of people don't get the same support from their families. I like Mandurah though. I've been here since I was five years old and think it's a good place to live because there are always different activities to get involved in.

I've been able to build a strong connection with my parents and my two sisters, Tiarna, who is

my twin, and Montanah who is 11 years old. Although we're all quite different, we all have each other's backs and encourage each other to do our best. I love that my family always shows an interest in what I'm doing, even when I'm tackling something new.

They tell me that I can do anything and that has given me hope for the future.

I have a lot planned for my future. First, I want to finish high school because I think education is very important; it's pretty much the key

to deciding what you want to be and, without it, I think you might not get as far in life. Having an education will help me understand more about the world we live in and how I can add to it. It's the most important thing we have in this world!

My dream is to be an air hostess. I'm doing a two-year traineeship with Qantas in customer service to help me get there and it has been such an eye opener.

Although I don't like book work much, I really love physical education. I was selected to be a part of the Indigenous Australian netball team and went to Queensland to play in a tournament. I've also been selected for the Mandurah talent and development netball squad every year since I was 12.

Sport has helped me to believe in myself. It's a good feeling to work towards something and get the credit after all my hard work.

Since starting high school, I have felt many highs and lows and have gone through some pretty hard times. I also worry about a lot of things. I worry that I won't graduate Year 12, I hate seeing people not achieve what they are capable of and I worry about other people, especially in third world countries, who aren't able to have an education. But with the support of my family, I know I'll be ok. They've taught me to try and live my life without any regrets, to take the knocks on the chin and be as happy as I possibly can.

My family has been there for me every step of the way. I am forever grateful to have them in my life. I wouldn't trade them for anything.

“With the support of my family, I know I'll be ok.”



Getting involved in the community

Grace, 12, Midland

I like to do lots of good things. I'm in Year 7 and my most favourite thing to do is sport, especially netball. You can meet people and make new friends playing sport, that's what I like. I also like English because we get to do interesting work and read books, but I do like sport more.

I think school is important because it's good for when you grow up. It gets you a nice job and lets you have a future. I want to be a netballer when I get older.

When I'm not at school I dance in a hip hop crew called the Beat Walkers. We do all sorts of cultural performances for people. I'm excited for NAIDOC Week because we are doing a couple of dances at the local community event. Lots of people come so it's fun to show them our talents and what we've worked on.

Dancing is great. It lets you see other people's points of view and teaches us about how when you work together you can create something amazing.

It's good to inspire other people.

Our four-day dance workshop in Kellerberrin was something special. Our dance crew learnt some dances and skills and also went bush with some elders for a bit to learn about the land.

At home in Midland I live with my mum and three brothers, I'm the second oldest.

I like to practice our Aboriginal culture by singing songs while my mum plays the guitar. That's why we're doing stuff for NAIDOC Week.

My mum says it's important for me to see Indigenous people come together to support reconciliation. I like being involved in something important.

“ My mum says it's important for me to see Indigenous people come together to support reconciliation. ”



Having the right attitude can help

Jacinta, 15, Busselton

One cool thing I've done as part of school was go on an exchange in Japan. We went to school with a Japanese student and followed them around so that we could experience their lives.

The culture was so different; I had such an amazing time. It was hard though because I don't speak any Japanese!

I'm not really sure what I want to do when I leave school, I'm still trying to decide; maybe like in media or a teacher or something.

I think everyone should be able to go to school. It gives you an education and gets you where you want to be.

Sometimes things like where kids come from, or the way they're brought up or financial issues can stop them though.

I think having the right attitude can help kids to do well too. You know, staying positive and helping others in the community and stuff. Having respect for yourself and others is also important.

I like living on the coast, there's always lots of activities on. We often go to the beach to swim and there are some really good snorkelling spots. Busselton is quite busy these days and is getting busier.

On the weekends I play hockey for a girls' team called the Cavaliers. I like it. People think it's a scary sport but I'm so used to it now.

I also like to hang out with my family and friends. I live with my two parents and two younger sisters.

We go on family outings sometimes, camping and fishing and telling stories together.

I love my family. They're important to me.

“ I think everyone should be able to go to school. It gives you an education and gets you where you want to be. ”



Staying connected to my culture

Kearn, 13, Derby

My Aboriginal culture means a lot to me. I live in Derby in the West Kimberley but sometimes we visit my mum's country and go out hunting and fishing and catch rock cod and blue bone. I catch the fish and can fillet it myself, which my uncle taught me to do. I like to snorkel and go spear fishing and drag netting.

I like learning about my family's heritage and what it means to be Bardi. I am also connected to Japanese and English culture.

We follow traditional lore in Derby. Sometimes this means it's hard for young men to go to school though because they become a man and have other responsibilities.

I go to school every day though, even when I'm sick. I also do Follow the Dream two days a week too. It's a tutoring program that's helping me do better at school.

I've just been on a camp to Rumble Bay. I was one of four kids picked to go and we got to learn about leadership and team building. Others came from Yiyili, Noonkanbah and from Perth. I'm trying to take what I've learnt and use the skills in my own community.

I play basketball and football with Clontarf and my own team called the Back Street Bulls. I do swimming, football and volleyball too. I went to a physiotherapy clinic once where they came and taught us how to strap up injuries. When I grow up I think I want to be a physiotherapist.

I live with my family. We all live in the same house, that's good because I get to see my brothers every day. I like Derby. It's good here.

“ My Aboriginal culture means a lot to me. ”



Building confidence through sport

Dainira, 17, Geraldton

My most memorable achievement in life so far is being named Sports Woman of the Year at my graduating ceremony. It was pretty exciting. I remember my name being called out and feeling very proud.

I have always enjoyed sport.

In my final year at school I was house captain, the captain for our school's Country Week basketball team and also completed my bronze medallion.

Being involved in sport has given me a chance to make new friends, become more confident in myself and has also opened up so many work opportunities.

At the moment I'm working for the Geraldton Sporting Aboriginal Corporation, where I've had the chance to coordinate the 2015 Perth Netball Carnival. I'm also helping to plan a women's health and wellbeing program, which involves fitness, exercise, gym classes and support for young women.

As part of my contract with the Geraldton Sporting Aboriginal Corporation, I work one day a week at Geraldton Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation in reception, where I help to plan some of the holiday programs, camps and fundraising activities for the younger members of the community.

“ I want to make a difference in my community. ”

I feel the skills I've learnt in sport have helped me a lot in this role. Things like team work, discipline and working hard for your goals.

I like the Streetwork Aboriginal Corporation because they welcome members from all walks of life and are non-judgemental. I have received great mentoring and support from them.

Good health and wellbeing is so important to me. In 2016, I'm going to enrol in university and study to become a nurse. I want to make a difference in my community.



Being a leader

Jay, 17, Caversham

I am Koori, born in Perth. I have always lived in the Midland area within the Noongar community with my mum, brother and sister. If I didn't have my mum, I don't think I would be the same person. She has been my mother and father. She has always provided for us even though it hasn't been that easy for her. She has given up her whole life for us kids. I've had a number of male role models in my life, like my uncles and pops from my extended family who teach things like to be strong, have respect, and not to let anyone put it over you.

But my mum has taught me all that too, she's taught me everything I need.

School is important; it prepares you to take on responsibility when you get older. It prepares you for the outside world because things aren't always going to go your way. It's good to find people who believe in you at school. I think if they believe in you, then maybe we should start believing too. I actually love school but sometimes it stresses me out.

Other things worry me too like what if the world keeps going the way it is and no one is prepared to make change and be nicer to each other.

Right now it feels like nothing is going to change and people are not coming to together like they should. Especially in Australia where there is still a huge separation between cultures and beliefs. It's separation that makes us weak, not where we're individually from or what we believe in. Together, we can be strong.

I play the guitar, didgeridoo, ukulele and drums. I like a crazy variety of music, especially Jimmy Barnes, he's my idol. Music gives me inspiration to try new things and have a go. Sometimes it even shows me how little I actually know about life. It's also good for de-stressing when times get tough.

My best advice to kids who are going through a lot would be to try and put things in perspective. There are always other people going through and dealing with worse things so try not to stress about it.

You should always push yourself and try your hardest though. You can only do your best and if you know it is your best, then that's fine.

Kids also need to know when to ask for help. If you go through life refusing support then you're not going to get very far. It's like tutoring, it makes you better and improves you. That's why I want a career where I can help people. I grew up in a life where drugs, alcohol and bad influences were all around me. I'm not saying my life was wrecked but it could have been easy for me to give up and just copy those people.

I figured out that it was up to me. In fact, my greatest personal achievement is that I decided to be different. Reconnecting with my Noongar culture let me find out who I was again and made me proud. It was the change in my life that I needed.

“ School is important. ”



Education creates opportunities

Jasirah, 18, Perth

My Bardi culture has made me who I am today. I'm originally from One Arm Point, a community that is about 250km north of Broome. It is very remote but there are plenty of opportunities to get out on the land with my parents and five older siblings when I go back home.

I moved to Perth when I was in Year 9 to better my education. None of my family came with me though so I lived in a boarding school.

My parents thought it was important that I build a future for myself so encouraged me to go. I'm glad they did. It was such a change of scenery coming to Perth; I just remember it being really big.

By attending school, I got a good education and many opportunities have opened up for me. At high school I became the Reconciliation Captain and won the 2012 Kimberley Young Leaders Award. I also got the chance to take part in the Leeuwin Ocean Adventure, where I learnt about team work, trust and leadership, and how to deal with sea sickness!

Now I'm in my first semester at university studying to be a marine scientist. I grew up near the coast so I guess it was an easy choice for me. When I finish my degree I want to educate others back home about the ocean and how we can be more sustainable. I might even use my degree and go work overseas someday. It would have to be somewhere tropical though because I can't stand the cold.

Recently I took part in a social experiment on Cottesloe beach in Perth with the ICEA Foundation. I was blindfolded and stood with my arms out-stretched asking for a hug. I was so nervous but eventually people started coming forward to hug me. It was so interesting to test people's attitudes towards Aboriginal Australians.

Although I miss my family, I have lots of friends who have become

“ **Australia is such a great country.** ”

Raising awareness about my culture is something I'm passionate about. I volunteer with the Indigenous Communities Education & Awareness (ICEA) Foundation, where I help to coordinate the Marja Series. This program brings lots of young people together so we can talk about and promote reconciliation.

like my family, especially from the Dandjoo Darbalung program at The University of Western Australia's Saint Catherine's College. My goal is to continue to raise awareness about reconciliation and to celebrate my culture. Australia is such a great country.



A sense of community

CJai, 17, Kununurra

I've lived in Kununurra my whole life. It's very small here and everyone knows each other.

I'm part of the Pilbara Kariyarra and Kitja people so traditional lore and our culture means everything to my community.

Sometimes we go to traditional smoking ceremonies to cleanse the land. The elders say some words and we all have lunch together.

I would really like to learn my traditional language from my grandad. It's so wicked to hear it.

Although I don't live at home, I still see my parents, two brothers and five sisters all the time.

If I had to explain Kununurra to someone who hadn't been here before, I'd say it looks like the bush does in the movies. It's almost imaginary, like it's so beautiful sometimes it doesn't seem real. There are lots of waterfalls, and hills; it's not flat country at all.

Heaps of tourists come; they drive up to Kelly's Knob which is a great lookout point. You can basically see the whole town from up there.

In Kununurra, Save the Children is a place where kids can come and hang out after school.

“ I would really like to learn my traditional language from my grandad. ”

I love visiting Lake Argyle. Did you know the lake is actually bigger than Sydney's harbour? I find that so fascinating. We go fishing and swimming there. In winter when it rains a lot I get scared because the lake often floods. It just proves how much water there is here. Often people think Kununurra is just red dirt.

I help these kids out, like talk to them and sometimes we even cook dinner for them. I also help with the kids programs on the weekends. There are things like girls and boy's fishing trips. Girls and boys aren't allowed to socialise together up here. It's just how it is. I don't mind, we still have fun.

I'm not in school anymore. I finished Year 11 and then decided it would be better to get my certificates in community development and work directly with the local youth.

Sometimes I worry about where I'll be in the future, like everyone I suppose, but being with Save the Children gives me confidence it will all work out.



Me and my family

Corbyn, 13, Beagle Bay

I live in Beagle Bay now but I was born in Broome. I've lived in Beagle Bay for a while though. It looks beautiful here by the coast.

I live with my mum, dad and my brother who is turning nine years old this year. He's, how do I put it, very energetic. We hang out sometimes but he's young.

My family are Bardi and Nyul Nyul so we do a lot to practice our culture. We go fishing and hunting and we dance and make things.

We teach others about our culture too and we speak our language. I think I would like to learn even more about it, like hear more Dreamtime stories and speak more of my language. I got to go on a leadership camp recently at Rumble Bay where I got to show other kids all my different skills.

Me and my family also believe in God, we're Catholic. I think God teaches good discipline and morals. It teaches me how to pray for others too, like to make sure my family is OK.

My family is important because they help keep us all together, they teach me new things and they support me when things aren't going well. Family should be number one for everyone.

I think learning is good, I even like maths! I go to school in Beagle Bay and want to go to high school when I'm finished. That will have to be in Perth though.

I dream to be a football or basketball player one day. It would be good if there was a recreation centre here where we could have fun and do more sport competitions. There's nothing like that here now.

I think all kids should do sport; it tells you what we got to do to reach our goals. I practice my sport every day. I love it that much. Dreams can come true if you practice lots.

“ Dreams can come true if you practice lots. ”



You make your own destiny

Brayden, 17, Carnarvon

One day I want to leave Australia and travel to another continent. I've only left WA once. I've lived in Carnarvon most of my life, but have also been to Darwin, Karratha and Perth, where I lived with my aunty and went to school for a few months. I'd rather be in Carnarvon though.

I'm from the Yamatji and Yinggarda people. I'd like to learn more about our languages and spiritual ways, and where our people used to go, like the old places and sites. My dad knows a bit about my culture but my uncles, they know a lot more.

I just haven't always got time to see them because they work.

At home I live with my mum and dad, my two brothers and two sisters. I'm the oldest. I have a lot of extended family from all over the place too. I have heaps of good childhood memories.

One of my favourites is when we went camping out at Rocky Pool with my family. My aunties, uncles, cousins, nan and pop were all there. We lit a fire and stayed up until about two in the morning just yarning and having a laugh with each other. We slept under the stars and I can still remember them shining.

When I was younger I thought school was just about learning something. But now I see it actually sets you up for the future and opens up more job opportunities.

This time last year, I wouldn't have said I liked school but my teachers, family and the Clontarf Academy have all helped me to get better.

“ Don't lose faith in yourself.”

When I first started Clontarf I kept getting in trouble, like missing the camps and stuff. I felt pretty left out though so decided I didn't want to be in trouble anymore. It's more fun doing the right thing. It means I can get more involved, and not only help others but improve myself. Getting better makes you feel good. Like now I've been given an opportunity to do an apprenticeship with Rio Tinto. I'm so proud of that.

School is important. It teaches you discipline, things like not rocking up late and being organised. In my family there are some who work and others who don't. I can definitely see the advantages of working, they're just better off.

I think a lot of young kids drink too much and do drugs and choose

to live with each other at a young age instead of concentrating on school and work. Maybe they think another chance will come by. I think you should take all the opportunities and support you can. I say just ignore the people that are giving you a hard time, stick with your family and trust your teachers.

Don't lose faith in yourself because you make your own destiny.



Stick with things to improve

Lola, 10, Fremantle

I love my family. As well as my parents, I live with my two sisters, my brother and my dog, Opie. I was really happy and surprised when I got my dog, that was such a special feeling. Even though dad works fly-in fly-out, I still see him. We go to the beaches with Opie, for walks in the park, out to the shops and sports and we play games together. My family is always there for me when I need them and I would be so lost if I didn't have them.

I don't know much about my culture. I do want and need to learn much more though because it's a part of everyday life. I am interested in everything about it.

School is where I get my learning and education. It's fun there; you get to talk to friends and learn and all that. My favourite subjects are writing and reading because I like to write stories, and when we read we do it in groups like for plays. I like working in groups, you get to work with your friends and you can get the job done easier and faster.

To improve my chances at school and to get good grades I try to study and stay out of trouble. Sometimes school stresses me out but I normally get over it by watching TV or playing outside and doing things I enjoy. I'd say if you were feeling stressed try not to be afraid. You can get help from people that you know, ask for help from your family or talk to someone about it.

My dream is to go to the Olympics. My heroes are Sally Pearson and Usain Bolt. I've met Sally Pearson three times already, she's nice. When I saw her one time I asked her for a tip before I was going the state champs, and she told me to run fast.

I know if I want to go to the Olympics I need to train a lot, and it also depends on my attitude. My mum says if you have a good attitude you can do anything.

“ My mum says if you have a good attitude you can do anything. ”

I have been doing athletics since I was seven. I love the hurdles and triple jump the best. I ran in the state championships when I was nine and made it to the final but I came last. The coach said I had a lot of potential as I was young and inexperienced compared to the other girls so I've stuck with it.

If I get famous I would like to start a foundation where I can help Aboriginal people who are homeless and don't have much money.

The kids could get involved in sport and get an education, and we can give out clothes and get beds at the centre so they can sleep. My foundation will help with that.



Being a role model

Laurelle, 15, Warburton

I'm 15 and have lived in Warburton since I was a baby. All the people I know are here, my family, my friends. Warburton is in the Ngaanyatjarra lands. We all speak the same language every single day. It's different to any other place because it's my home. I feel connected here.

I live with a lot of people. It's hard to even count. I have my mum, five brothers, a sister and then we live with my grandma, uncles and aunties too. We also have two dogs and five puppies, which are my mums.

We all go out bush together for fun. Going bush is part of our culture. The women look for goannas, witchetty grubs and onions and the men hunt for kangaroos and bush turkeys. We travel to different places by car. Sometimes we travel a long way on the weekends and camp out. I help with the cooking, which my family taught me.

My grandma likes to tell me stories about the past, long time ago and my culture. I love talking about those things and so do all the other young kids. I like knowing my family will keep teaching me things. I tell my little brothers and

sister stories and show them things too. It's a different sort of learning to school. I go to the high school girls' class. The class changes a bit, sometimes there's hardly anyone and other times it's full with 15 or 16 girls in there.

School's OK. I cook and work and play sports like softball and soccer. In the morning we have a yarning circle to talk to each other, and in class we learn about different countries, people, languages and do maths and writing. Writing is my favourite.

I want to do more work experience like that. It makes me feel grown up, a bit like what I might be doing one day.

I'm proud of my achievements at school; it makes me feel good when people say I do well at it. I work hard and help the little kids. I tell them to go to school and stay in class, and to think about school better. They look up to me.

Sometimes I think having a high school for kids out here and a hall or place to do things would be good.

“ If kids need help, I say go talk to someone. ”

I also got an opportunity to do some work experience at a clinic. I worked with the dentist and helped him out, like went round with the community and saw patients.

I sometimes worry about my friends when they're feeling sad. There are enough places round here to ask for help though. They can talk to their family, or if they come into school they can ask teachers or youth workers in the community. If kids need help, I say go talk to someone.





Thank you
for your
support...

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