



Young Territorians Report 2021

Youth Voice NT Project Report



Young Territorians Report 2021: Youth Voice NT Project Report

This report was written by Aysha Kerr with support from Marissa Pattison. Importantly, this report includes and elevates the voices of young people from across the Northern Territory (NT).

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This report has been designed by Refuel Creative.

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Acknowledgement

This report was written on Larrakia country in the Darwin region and Arrernte country in Mparntwe (Alice Springs). Youth Voice NT acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout the NT and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. Aboriginal sovereignty has not been ceded. This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.



This report uses the term 'Aboriginal' to refer to First Nations people living in the Northern Territory. Any reference to 'Aboriginal' people in this report should be read to include the diversity of language, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This report uses the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' where original sources are being quoted.

About Youth Voice NT

Youth Voice NT is a youth advocacy project that elevates the voices of young people and the youth sector in the Northern Territory (NT). The project helps young people to have a say about things that impact everyone in the community, and focuses on building the capacity of young people and the youth sector in the NT. This includes sharing the talents and stories of young Territorians.

The project has a particular focus on supporting young people from diverse backgrounds, including:

- Aboriginal young people
- Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) young people
- Young people in remote and very remote areas of the NT
- Young parents
- Young people not engaged in education, training or employment
- Young people in the out of home care system
- Young people at risk of or involved in the youth justice system

- Young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness
- Young people with chronic health conditions and mental health conditions
- Young people with alcohol and other drug use
- Young LGBTQIA+ people
- Young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- Young people with disability
- Young people who have experiences with domestic, family, and sexual violence



Acknowledgements

Youth Voice NT acknowledges and thanks each and every young person and youth service provider who contributed to this project. A special thank you to our Youth Voice Steering Committee:



Youth Voice NT acknowledges the Commonwealth Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment and thanks the Department for making this project possible.



Australian Government
**Department of Education,
Skills and Employment**



About the front cover artist

The artwork on the front cover of the report was purchased from an upcoming young artist named Cedella Marika (5 years old). Cedella's clan is Rirratjinu and she is from the North East Arnhem Land region in the NT. Daughter of Dhurumuwyu.

Her mother's mother's mother is Gulumbu Yunupingu, the First Prize winner in the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award (NATSIAA) 2004. Her father's mother's father is Yanggarriny Wunumurra, the First Prize winner in 1997.

In mid-2021, Cedella started making artwork for sale and her precocious talent amazed everyone.

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About the Youth Voice NT logo

Melanie Gunner, a young artist and advocate for youth mental wellbeing from Mparntwe, was commissioned by NTCOSS to produce the Youth Voice NT logo. The colours in the logo represent the diverse communities and backgrounds of young Territorians.

A former chair of the Youth Round Table and winner of the Glencore McArthur River Mining Regionals and Rural Initiative Award in 2020, Melanie is committed to communicating how life is different in the regional and rural communities for young people.

Melanie has worked in the youth services sector for several years. She has experience in delivering workshops and presentations, primarily around mental health and wellbeing, and now works for Balanced Choice – an organisation passionate about supporting young people across the Territory and working closely with them to encourage them to make positive choices. Sharing her mental health story has helped many young people across the Territory. Melanie's work caught the eye of SBS Insight in 2019, when they interviewed her about her story and growing up in a small town with limited resources.

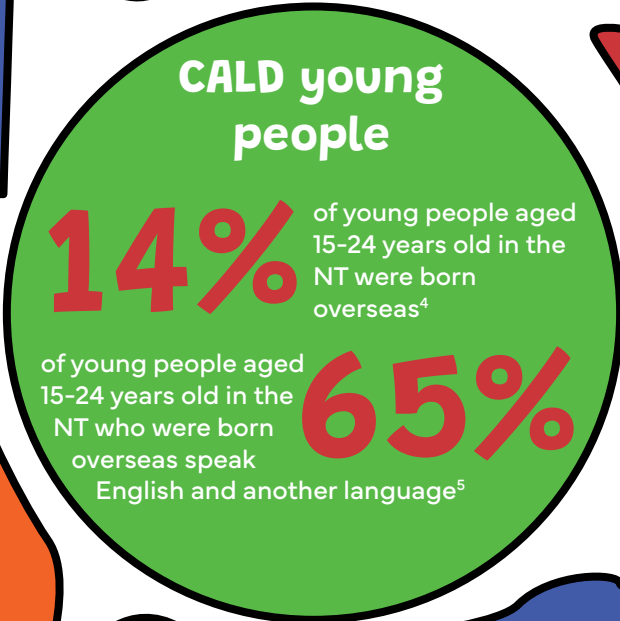
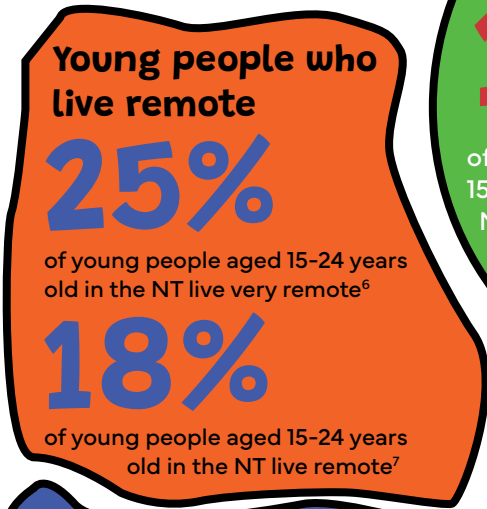
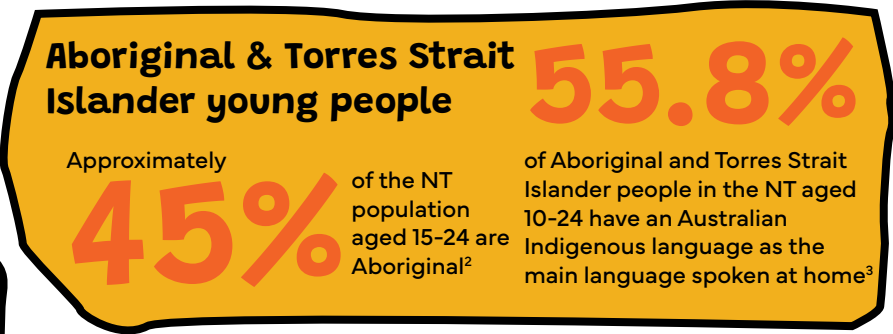
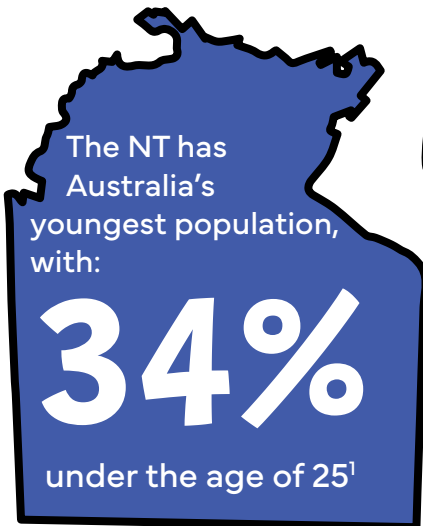
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Despite her challenges with mental health and other challenges, Melanie also runs her own successful art business. With this business she has also completed over five murals around Mparntwe, as part of the Alice Springs Street Art festivals.

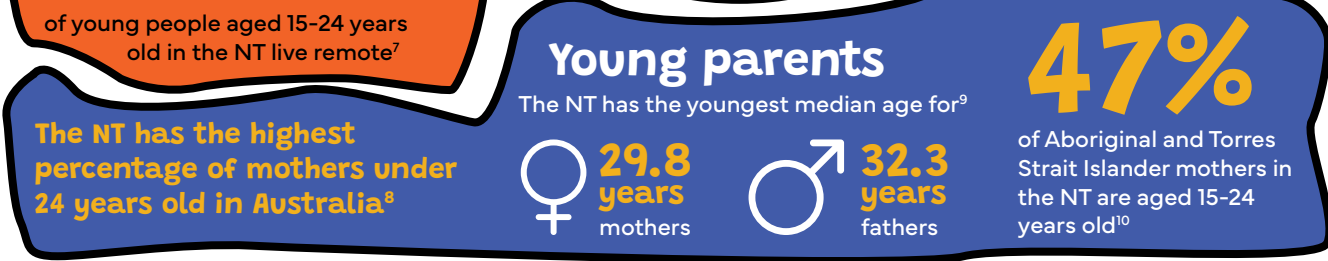


Data on young Territorians

This report provides a snapshot of data for context on the unique experiences of young people in the NT as related to Youth Voice. For a more comprehensive picture of data relating to children and young people in the NT, refer to the biennial Story of our Children and Young People publication (the Story). The Story addresses the demand for an evidence-base to inform actions that improve outcomes for the children and young people of the NT as well as provides in-depth data and stories relating to the wellbeing of our children and young people in the NT and across its six regions.



Information about young LGBTQIA+ people in the NT is a clear data gap.



1. ABS 2020. Regional population by age and sex: Statistics about the population by age and sex for Australia's capital cities and regions. 2. ABS 2018. Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. 3. Ibid. 4. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census of Population and Housing. 5. Ibid. 6. 2016 Census QuickStats Very Remote Australia (NT). 7. 2016 Census QuickStats Remote Australia (NT). 8. AIHW 2021b. Australia's mothers and babies. 9. ABS 2019. Births, Australia. 10. Ibid.

Education

49%

of all students in the NT have a language background other than English¹¹

41%

of students in the NT are enrolled at schools in remote and very remote areas¹²

91%

is the attendance rate for non-Aboriginal students in the NT¹³

63%

is the attendance rate for Aboriginal students in the NT

Young people at risk of, or involved in the youth justice system

94%

of young people aged 10-17 years old under youth justice supervision on an average day in the NT in 2019-20 were Aboriginal¹⁴

The rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal young people (10-17 years old) in the NT is 42 times the rate for non-Aboriginal young people and 17 times the rate nationally¹⁵

Young people and social and emotional wellbeing

From 2016 to 2020, the suicide rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 0 to 24 years old in the NT was over 3x higher than the rate for non-Indigenous people the same age.¹⁹

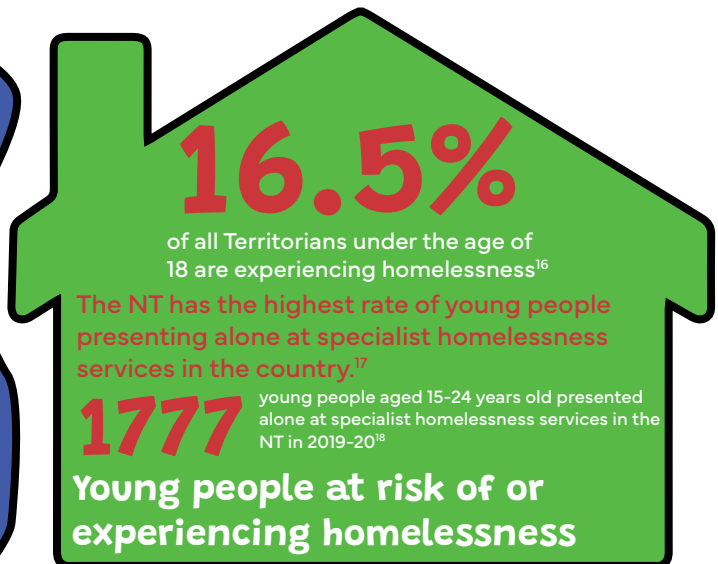
Young people who have experiences with domestic, family, and sexual violence (DFSV)

DFSV is a key driver of children and young people entering the child protection and youth justice systems.²⁰

In 2019-20, there were

8545

child protection notifications in the NT with a contributing factor of domestic violence²¹



11. Department of Education 2021. Education Engagement Strategy Discussion Paper. 12. Ibid. 13. Ibid. 14. AIHW 2021c. 15. AIHW 2020b. Youth Justice in Australia 2018-19. ABS cat. no. JUV132, Supplementary Table S85b 16. Which according to the ABS is likely an underestimate; NT Shelter 2021. Educational Resources: Homelessness in the NT. 17. AIHW 2020c. Specialist homelessness services annual report. 18. Ibid. 19. ABS 2021. Deaths by suicide amongst Indigenous Australians. 20. NT Government, Department of Territory Families 2020. Annual Report 2019-20. 21. Ibid.

Background

In late 2020, NTCOSS was awarded a Youth Advocacy Support Grant from the Commonwealth Government's Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) to employ a youth advocacy project officer and set up the Youth Voice NT Project. The purpose of this report is to document the outcomes of this project and provide policy recommendations to the Commonwealth Government.

NTCOSS applied for this grant funding as the NT has the highest proportion of young people in the country¹, yet we are the only jurisdiction in Australia without a fully funded youth peak body or youth affairs council. In every other jurisdiction, these organisations receive core and project funding from their respective state and territory governments. They employ full-time staff including policy/advocacy officers, sector development staff, administrative staff and, in some states, youth participation officers. Most have a membership base of individual youth services and/or local or regional networks of youth service providers.

Young people and the youth sector in the NT continue to advocate for a youth peak body

to be established and fully funded in the NT. There is a key opportunity for the NT to have one voice to represent young people and the youth sector, which has been highlighted in other NT wide consultations². This Commonwealth Government Youth Advocacy Support Grant funding to establish a youth peak role has been a significant win for the youth sector and young people in the NT.

Definition of young people

The funding for this grant agreement focused on young people aged 15 to 24 years across the NT. As noted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in its recent report titled 'Australia's Youth', the 'age range for young people vary across Australian and international data collections and reporting'³. The United Nations defines youth as those aged 15 to 24 years old for statistical reporting purposes⁴. This is the definition that will be used for the purpose of this report. However, Youth Voice NT acknowledges that the definition of young people in Australia is often broader than this definition and includes young people aged 12 to 25 years old.⁵

Australian Youth Development Index

In 2021, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) introduced the Australian Youth Development Index (AYDI) 2020 in partnership with Numbers and People Synergy. The project was funded by the Department of Health, on behalf of Senator, the Hon Richard Colbeck, then Minister for Youth and Sport to contribute to the National Youth Taskforce's work in the design and implementation of youth policies.

The AYDI 2020 is an instrument that highlights progress in youth development in Australia and its jurisdictions⁶. So how did the NT go?

We scored⁷:

0.79 out of 1

in the domain 'community and culture' in 2019
top of the country since 2015

0.47 out of 1

in the domain 'education and skills' in 2019
lowest in country since 2015 but our score has increased from 0.29 in 2017

1. ABS 2021. National, state and territory population.

2. AADANT 2020. Alcohol and Other Drugs Youth Project 2020: Final Report.

3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021. Australia's youth.

4. United Nations 2021. Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Youth Frequently Asked Questions.

5. Australian Youth Affairs Coalition 2011. Australian Youth Affairs Coalition - Submission to A Definition of a Charity

6. Numbers and People Synergy 2021. Australian Youth Development Index (AYDI) 2020.

7. Ibid

0.36 out of 1

in the domain 'safety and security' in 2019

a decrease from 0.52 in 2016

0.34 out of 1

in the domain 'health and wellbeing' in 2019

lowest in the country since 2015 but our score has increased from 0.16 in 2017

0.25 out of 1

in the domain 'employment and opportunity' in 2019

a decrease from 0.40 in 2017

0.03 out of 1

in the domain 'civic and political engagement' in 2019

lowest in the country since 2015

Some people may look at this and think it is bad news. But we think this tells us where we are strong, and how we can build on these strengths to improve the lives of young Territorians, our families, and our communities. Our biggest asset is our connection to 'community and culture' – and we should continue to mobilise this asset to become stronger in the other five domains. This

sets the context for this report – young Territorians bring a unique and valuable connection to community and culture that we can utilise in all aspects of policy, strategy, and services in the NT and at the national level.

Why did we write this report?

We wrote this report to share what Young Territorians have said about the six priority areas of the Commonwealth Government's National Youth Policy Framework (the Framework). The six priority areas are:



1. Youth empowerment and engagement



2. Opportunity and security



3. Safety, inclusion, respect and acceptance



4. Health and wellbeing



5. Navigating the system



6. The environment



The Commonwealth Government launched the Framework on 12 August 2021 following consultations with young Australians. The Framework has a strong focus on what young people need

to successfully transition into adulthood while maintaining mental health and wellbeing.

The Framework has five objectives:

Objective 1:

Acknowledge the impact of COVID-19 on young Australians

Objective 2:

Capture the voice of young people on policies that affect us

Objective 3:

Listen and respond to young people on the issues that matter to us

Objective 4:

Outline the services and programs available to young people

Objective 5:

Continue the journey to work together

How did we write this report?

At the start of the project, young people and youth workers said:

- consultations with us should be relationship-based not outcomes-focused
- it takes time to develop strong relationships and trust with us and our communities
- many people are consulting us, but it is not coordinated
- some communities have consultation fatigue
- governments need to listen to, and action, what we are saying (instead of asking us the same questions)

We talked about what young people and youth workers said at our Youth Voice NT Steering Committee meetings and agreed that it is important for our project to listen to this feedback. Initially, we spoke about developing survey questions that young people could complete with youth workers or online to inform this report.

However, noting the short timeframes of this project, we later agreed that there was not enough time to develop

questions that would be accessible to all young people from diverse backgrounds. We spoke about the time it would take to: 1) develop the consultation questions; 2) have these translated into first languages; and 3) allow enough time for young people to complete the survey questions.

To ensure the project respected the importance of building relationships with young people and youth workers, we instead agreed to take two steps:

1. pull together the collective voices of young people from previous consultations over the past five years in the NT
2. work with young people and youth workers on our Steering Committee to develop accessible and culturally appropriate resources so young people can share their story



What we found

Youth empowerment and engagement

What have young people said?

"There are no better people to understand the issues that young people face, than young people."
– Time to Talk Alice Springs, 2017 NT Youth Round Table⁸

- empowerment and engagement is very important to Young Territorians

- we have a vision for an Australia where:

- all young people have a voice and are believed, listened to, respected, and acknowledged

- our contributions are recognised and celebrated

- we are included in decisions that affect us

- we are empowered to be the best we can be

- there are limited opportunities for young people to have a voice in our community – providing opportunities for us to have a voice is key to youth empowerment and making change

- there needs to be stronger and ongoing engagement with young people in all aspects of decision-making including in the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programs

- involving young people in local decision making is beneficial for everyone in the community

- shame, embarrassment, and shyness can prevent us from sharing our voices

- appropriate use of language is very important for engagement. Using first languages or translators can ease nerves, create respect, and build rapport

- creating shared language during consultations builds an environment where participants can:

- feel empowered

- speak from a strong united voice

- show care for themselves and their peers

- have open conversations

- youth engagement should be relationship-based not outcomes-focused

- it is important governments and non-government organisations work with mentors, youth workers, coaches, and other trusted adults who work with young people, so we are supported to participate in consultations. This will also help to make sure youth engagement is conducted in a culturally appropriate and trauma-informed way

- it is important governments and non-government organisations value our contributions by including funding for honorariums and youth engagement activities within project budgets and funding programs

8. https://youth.nt.gov.au/Documents/Round%20Table%20Reports/Time%20to%20Talk_FINAL.pdf

What do young people want?



We want:

- to be strong voices in our communities and to be consulted before major decisions that directly impact our lives are made
- to be consulted in a variety of ways including through schools, clubs, youth centres, community events, youth services, social media, posters in the community, surveys, youth networks/committees, youth groups, and youth forums
- information for young people to be promoted and shared in creative and culturally appropriate ways
- youth consultations to be fun, engaging, and enjoyable – and to be led by us
- youth consultations to value our time and support our engagement by:



providing food or catering



selecting suitable venues and creating safe environments



providing incentives such as vouchers, payment, or gifts



offering transport options

- more opportunities and training to help us build confidence and to advocate on issues that are important to us
- more mentorship opportunities to help us make our projects and ideas a reality
- empowerment, communication, education, and engagement to be promoted at all levels in the community – and for young people to be consulted earlier
- reports, or youth friendly versions of reports, to be written in plain English so they are accessible to all young people

We want governments and non-government organisations to:

- build authentic relationships with us and meaningfully engage us to co-design appropriate solutions
- stop imposing short timeframes on consultations and instead take the time to hear our ideas – building relationships and trust leads to better outcomes
- work with us using inter-sectorial approaches and established resources and networks
- build genuine relationships with our communities to learn what place-based and local participation models work best. This includes working with Elders, creating local content, and involving prominent local people
- work with trusted organisations and mentors to ensure the voices of young people from diverse backgrounds are included
- listen to, and work in partnership with us, and to make sure our voices are elevated and included in an ongoing way
- write and structure reports in a way that is accessible to, and easily understood by young people

9. https://territoryfamilies.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/786573/Darwin-Youth-Action-Plan.pdf

- make it easier for young people from diverse backgrounds to participate by:



developing resources and providing information in first languages



using mixed-method approaches



developing consultation questions with us



having main questions and optional questions



using flexible approaches and allowing us to create our own pathway through the participation process



asking whether we have any access requirements



involving trusted adult mentors

- provide outcomes and results back to us after consultations so that we know they have listened to our ideas

"Listen, talk and walk with young people"
- NT Youth Health Summit 2019¹⁰

Case Study – Youth engagement at City of Darwin Council

There are several best practice examples of youth engagement in the NT, including the City of Darwin Council, which invests in several initiatives that support young people to have a say and positively contribute to the community. This includes:

- **A Youth Advisory Committee:** A group of up to fifteen young people aged between 12 and 25 years who advise Council on a range of topics and make recommendations on issues that affect young people locally.
- **A City of Darwin Youth Charter:** A document that outlines Council's commitment to working with young people as valued community members and a set of guiding principles for Council employees, Aldermen, and the wider community.
- **LAUNCH Youth Programs:** A diverse range of events and activities for young people that cover sports, employability skills, arts, entertainment, and personal development. LAUNCH also engages young people in paid work as performers, graphic designers, workshop facilitators and through the emerging event producer and social media training programs.

- **Youth Information Card:** A free pocket-size card listing local youth support organisations that is produced and distributed to schools and youth service providers in the Darwin area annually.
- **A Youth Strategy:** A document that is co-designed with young people and sets out the five-year vision to promote and support the wellbeing of young people in Darwin.
- **Libraries:** Four libraries that offer a range of services, programs and materials to young people.
- **DARWWYN (Darwin Working with Youth Network):** A networking forum for youth services and youth sector workers, working with and for young people through the not-for-profit and government sectors in Darwin.

10. https://www.menzies.edu.au/icms_docs/323221_Youth_Health_Summit_Report_2019.pdf

What did our project do?

- in partnership with AYAC, Youth Voice NT ran an expression of interest round for young people across the Territory to apply to represent the NT on the Australian Young Leaders and Advocates Fellowship (YLAFF). The successful applicant was a young person who is a member of the 2021 NT Youth Round Table, and who also sits on our Youth Voice Steering Committee. For the first time, this provided an established mechanism for the voices of young Territorians to be included in national decision making processes
- we included and elevated the voices of young people at every stage of our project including by:



listening to, and drawing on, what young people have said in previous consultations



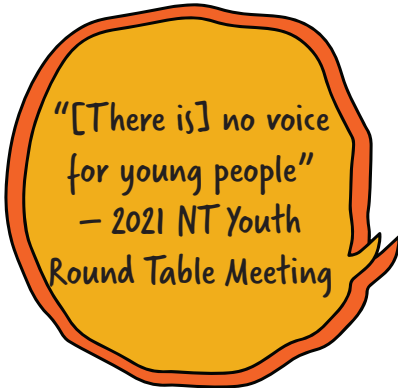
consulting through existing mechanisms such as the NT Youth Round Table, youth reference groups, and via trusted youth services



including young people on our Youth Voice NT Steering Committee and providing honorariums

- we worked with mentors, youth workers, and other trusted youth service providers who work with young people to ensure the project was sensitive to the needs and requirements of young people from diverse backgrounds
- we set up 'Youth Voice NT' Facebook and Instagram pages to share opportunities for young people to have their say and to provide a platform for young people to elevate their voices. The social media pages were established on 12 July 2021, and as of 24 October 2021, collectively have 349 followers
- we ran a targeted consultation with the NT Youth Round Table to seek feedback on youth engagement and on development of the Youth Voice NT website to ensure it provides useful information, events, and resources for young people
- we elevated the voices of young people in our submissions and advice to Governments through:
 - participation in the Commonwealth Government Youth Round Table Meetings coordinated by DESE
 - feedback to NT Government on the NT Education Engagement Strategy
 - feedback to the NT Government on work to enhance inclusivity in schools
 - feedback to the NT Government on the NT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework Action Plan 2
 - feedback on the 10-year Generational Strategy for Children and Families in the NT
 - feedback to the NT Government on the NT Gender Equality Statement of Commitment Action Plan

What else can we do?



It is recommended that the NT and Commonwealth governments:

- recognise and support the capacity of young people as leaders, advocates, and change agents in our community by including young people as equal participants in decision-making relating to the development, implementation and evaluation of Government policies, strategies, and initiatives. Young people must be recognised for the diverse expertise they bring across multiple policy areas as employers, employees, carers, and members of our society
- fully fund a youth peak body in the NT to support the continued, collaborative partnerships between governments, the non-government youth sector and young people in the NT. Similar to the AYAC YLAF and youth reference groups within youth peak bodies in other jurisdictions, a youth peak in the NT will value add, and work with, the NT Youth Round Table, the NT Youth Justice Advisory Committee, and other relevant groups to:
 - elevate the voices of young people and the youth sector in the NT by providing a coordinated voice to policy makers, governments and ministers
 - promote solutions to governments through policy submissions and advocacy in relevant forums relating to young people and the youth sector
 - build capacity of young people and the youth sector in the NT by identifying and facilitating training and workforce development opportunities
- support governments to convene representative consultations with young people and the youth sector in the NT to promote coordination and collaboration across multiple policy areas (eg. housing, education, health, employment)
- partner with key stakeholders to undertake research and explore best practice on areas related to young people and the youth sector in the NT.

Opportunity and security (including education and employment)

What have young people said?

- it is important we have access to a variety of opportunities for our wellbeing and growth
- school and learning are important to us. Education is an important, valuable, and fundamental building block to our wellbeing and safety as we transition into adulthood

- low school engagement is related to the challenges that many young people in the NT face, including poverty and the inability of the education system to meet our complex needs
- other barriers to accessing school include:
 - lack of engaging content
 - content being hard or taught in a way that is not accessible to everyone
 - schools being too far away from home
 - the school environment being scary
 - lack of support from friends and family
 - when school is not taught in our first language
- it is important that Aboriginal young people who leave community to attend boarding school receive support to maintain strong connections with culture and community
- training for young people, such as VET, must be linked to, and lead to, meaningful employment. Often young people complete training but then find it hard to get a job in the NT

- ranger programs are a positive example of programs that build their work experience and give them the skills to gain meaningful employment at the end of the program
- free and accessible transport is a key enabler of employment and education opportunities
- schools in the Territory have different policies, support, and opportunities for young people – there is no consistency across schools. For example, schools are different when it comes to:



mental health first aid training and support



respectful relationship education



bilingual education



trauma-informed practice and education

What do young people want?

“[We] don’t like when school is too far away from home and isn’t taught in language”
– Young Aboriginal people from Mparntwe Town Camps¹¹

We want:

- to reduce barriers and challenges for young people who are experiencing disadvantage in the NT, especially those who are disengaged from school
- every school in the NT to implement strategies that strengthen engagement of children and young people and help them catch up with they fall behind
- governments to prioritise strategies that increase engagement of Aboriginal young people in school and employment, particularly those who live in remote locations in the NT
- young people in remote areas of the NT to have the same level of access to services and supports as young people in urban centres
- bilingual education provision in every school in the NT
- more transitional support to be provided to students who move from primary school in neighbouring Aboriginal communities to high school

11. https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1229771/Keeping_Strong_report.pdf

- more culturally safe schools/schooling options in communities where there is currently limited access. We want schools to value and embrace our strong cultural connection and languages in the NT
- school to be engaging and fun, easy to comprehend for all young people, close to our homes and communities, and to be a safe environment where we have strong networks of friends, family, and Elders
- stronger school to work pathways. We want training and work opportunities in school and university that create positive career pathways and result in us getting a job. For example, VET or pathways programs that engage young people through school-based traineeships, apprenticeships, and cadetships
- schools to increase work experience opportunities for young people from diverse backgrounds, particularly in remote communities, as this will help us build the skills that we need to get a job
- schools to support us to write resumes and prepare for job interviews as this is important for creating future career pathways.

- more opportunities that support young people from diverse backgrounds to obtain a driver's licence and buy a car. We also want more free and accessible transport options for young people – particularly in areas of the Territory that are isolated from urban centres.

What did our project do?

- we elevated the voices of young people in a policy submission on the NT Government Education Engagement Strategy
- we organised free information sessions on superannuation for young people and the youth sector in partnership with HESTA
- we connected Menzies School of Health Research with the NT Regional Commissioner from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission to organise Financial Literacy Workshops for young people
- we elevated the voices of young people on education and employment opportunities through our involvement in the Darwin and Palmerston Community Investment Committee run by YouthWorxNT and coordinated by the Commonwealth Government DESE

- we provided paid opportunities for young people:



commissioned the design of our logo and the artwork for the front cover of this report



provided honorariums to young people on our steering committee



offered incentives for young people to share their creative work and story

- we launched a training and professional development calendar on our Youth Voice NT website for young people and the Youth Sector
- we launched a jobs noticeboard on our Youth Voice NT website to advertise jobs in the youth sector
- we connected Youth Law Australia (YLA) and Youth Development Australia (YDA) with the NT Youth Round Table, who worked with members to produce videos designed to help young people understand their workplace rights

- we promoted opportunities for young people related to education and employment on our social media pages such as the have your say opportunity for the Quality Initial Teach Education Review and events like the Charles Darwin University (CDU) Women’s Collective/CDU IT Students’ Association Career Pathways to STEMM Panel discussion.

Case Study – YouthWorX NT Community Investment Committee (CIC)

The CIC brings together representatives from the key sectors involved in supporting youth employment pathways, including: employers and industry, education and training, employment service providers, local councils and community organisations, to collaborate with each other and governments.

Alongside YouthWorX NT, members of the CIC actively contribute to:

- align investments and employment pathways for young people within the community

- drive solutions based on community priorities and a NT specific Youth Employment Action Plan
- create and strengthen local strategies and solutions that have national reach

The CIC forms a crucial local structure of the National Youth Employment Body (NYEB), which aims to align local and national

investments in employment, industry, education, and training, to inform and strengthen a coordinated, multi-sectoral response to youth unemployment.

Members come together to actively contribute to drive change through:

- sharing knowledge and information on the local labour market
- identifying opportunities and barriers specific to young people
- understanding how to harness key systemic opportunities and address gaps

What else can we do?

It is recommended that the NT and Commonwealth governments:

- strengthen collaborative efforts to meet the Closing the Gap NT Implementation Plan and improve our progress towards achieving the targets set under the 17 socioeconomic outcome areas of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- increase investment in effective approaches that bring together collaborative groups of stakeholders and strengthen pathways for young people to transition into meaningful jobs, now and into the future, with a particular focus on remote and very remote areas of the NT. This includes recommendations that the:
 - Commonwealth Government abolishes the Community Development Program (CDP) and fully adopts the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APONT) Fair Work and Strong Communities: Proposal for Remote Development and Employment Scheme

- NT and Commonwealth governments explore options to fully-fund and expand the Commonwealth Government CIC initiative to provide greater support to other regions in the NT
- review financial literacy education in schools and work with young people to develop and implement contemporary financial literacy education programs that are engaging and support young people to succeed in life
- fund the development of accessible and culturally appropriate resources (including in first languages) for young people from diverse backgrounds on:
 - accessing Government services like Centrelink and NDIS
 - financial literacy (including completing tax returns, superannuation, money management)
 - managing stress and anxiety
 - body image
 - mental health and suicide
 - alcohol and other drugs
 - bullying and respectful relationships
 - engagement with education

- training and employment
- online safety

It is recommended that the NT Government:

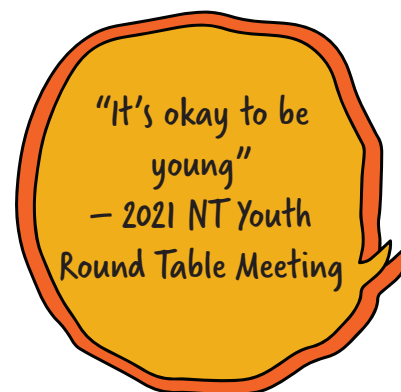
- fully funds and delivers all actions set out in NT Education Engagement Strategy, which sets a new course for student engagement and improved educational outcomes in the NT
- undertakes regular progress reporting throughout implementation of the NT Education Engagement Strategy to support a genuine commitment to education that has its foundations in culture and first languages

It is recommended that the Commonwealth Government:

- increases Youth Allowance, Abstudy, and JobSeeker allowances on a permanent basis by a minimum of \$175 per week to support young people to build a future for themselves whilst studying, training, and seeking out paid work
- ensures Aboriginal young people living in remote communities can access income support without having to meet more onerous conditions than those that are applied in urban centres

Safety, inclusion, respect, and acceptance

What have young people said?



- young Territorians are strong and proud of our community spirit
- our communities have strong culture, heritage, language, and stories – this is what makes us strong
- everyone in our community deserves to be heard, valued, and to grow up in a safe, respectful, and non-judgemental environment
- the mainstream media and some people in the community portray negative stereotypes about young people. The way we are portrayed in mainstream media and on social media influences and impacts our wellbeing and safety

- it is important we grow up with safe and secure relationships, as well as positive role models and mentors
- many young Territorians have been treated unfairly, or have witnessed someone being treated unfairly, for their gender, race/cultural background, and/or sexuality
- we feel safe with family, friends, school, and in healthy and safe environments
- we feel safe in places when they are welcoming, familiar, inclusive, comfortable, and provide peer support
- we feel safe in places when there is history and trust with the people working there and a community of listening and communicating
- being involved in the community, such as through local sporting teams, is important for inclusion
- being able to express ourselves, such as through music and art, is also important for inclusion

What do young people want?

We want:

- everyone to be treated equally and valued in all our diversity
- to be praised for our achievements and encouraged to celebrate our gifts and talents in our communities
- opportunities that showcase the value of young people and promote our positive contributions in mainstream media
- to increase education for young people on sexual health; domestic, family, and sexual violence; and respectful relationships so young Territorians grow up with healthy expectations and relationships
- to increase education for adults on the things some young Territorians go through and how to support us. It is important we have adults we can trust and talk to, and that adults understand the trauma and barriers experienced by young people in the Territory

- more safe spaces for, and designed by, young people and local youth drop-in centres/community spaces where young people can hang out, connect with peers, and engage in positive activities. We want these spaces to:
 - be owned and designed by young people
 - be safe and inclusive
 - have air-conditioning
 - have access to free internet
- more opportunities, events, and programs where we can be positive role models and be mentored in a safe environment.

What did our project do?

- we elevated the voices of young people in feedback to the NT Government on the NT Gender Equality Statement of Commitment; Action Plan 2 for the NT Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework; and other work on inclusivity in schools

- we facilitated Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) training for young people, the Sector, government, and industry in partnership with the Jeder Institute. This training was free for young people and focused on enhancing our collective knowledge of building on what is strong, not wrong, in our communities
- we ran a competition for young people to share their creative work so we can showcase the talents of young people from across the NT
- we created resources with our Steering Committee so that young people from diverse backgrounds can share their story if they feel comfortable
- we participated in Local Action Group meetings to provide feedback on the development and evaluation of Youth Action Plans in the NT

What else can we do?

It is recommended that the NT and Commonwealth governments:

- provide ongoing funding for Youth Voice NT to continue to work with the youth sector and young people to develop and share stories that promote the achievements, contributions, and experiences of young people from diverse backgrounds in the NT
- increase investment in culturally safe programs for children and young people relating specifically to DFSV reduction and support, ensuring that young people are involved in the co-design and implementation of these programs
- increase investment in crisis support for young families and young people experiencing or using violence in the NT
- engage young people in the NT to co-design culturally appropriate primary prevention education programs relating to consent, respectful relationships, and gender equality for widespread implementation in schools across the Territory



- raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the NT to 14 years.
- improve the collection and reporting of gender, sex, and sexuality disaggregated data relating to young people

It is recommended that the NT Government:

- implements all recommendations from the NT Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the NT¹²
- funds specific research and consultations with young LGBTQIA+ young people in the NT to understand their experiences and to inform the expansion of safe spaces and services across the Territory

Health and wellbeing

What have young people said?

"Bullying, depression and self-harm. All my friends go through depression and a lot of people are self-harming. (Not) having someone to talk to. The only place we have here is headspace and one private people. More would do something."
- Girl, 14 years.¹³

- policies and services must address the intersectionality of mental health with other areas of our lives including physical health, engagement in education, positive peer relationships, and safety
- there is an opportunity to improve availability of, and access to, youth specific mental health services (such as headspace) for young people in regional and remote areas in the Territory
- despite mental health awareness improving over the last few years, stigma still impacts whether people will reach out for help
- it is important that everyone in the community has the skills to support their peers and family who have mental health concerns
- suicide bereavement and suicidal behaviour impacts us, and our families, and our communities
- social media contributes to mental health concerns and impacts our sense of self-worth and body image
- meeting the needs of young people and ensuring our safety and wellbeing will support us to reach our full potential in all areas as adults
- mental health is one of our top priorities

12. The Royal Commission recommends that the minimum age of criminal responsibility is raised to 12 years. Following the Royal Commission, the UN benchmarked 14 as the absolute minimum age of criminal responsibility. Therefore, this report recommends that the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the NT is raised to 14 years.

13. https://occ.nt.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1028385/occ-submission-nmhc-draft-national-childrens-mental-health-wellbeing-strategy.pdf

- there is an opportunity for schools to implement comprehensive sexual health and wellbeing education. This should also cover the impact that pornography and sexual harassment have on our perceptions and behaviours
- young people currently experience barriers when seeking help for, and reporting instances of, sexual assault. There are additional barriers for young men and boys
- Clinic 34 is a good example of a free and confidential sexual health service operating in five major centres in the NT
- existing health services could be expanded to become a safe place for young people seeking help and advice on sexual assault
- it is challenging for young people, families, and communities to break the cycle of abuse without appropriate support to report early and change behaviours
- family and culture are protective factors that support our health and wellbeing. Friendships, school, and study satisfaction are also important to our health and wellbeing

- our health and wellbeing is impacted by:
 - suicide involving our family and friends
 - racism and lack of respect towards Aboriginal people in the Territory
 - ageism and lack of respect for young people in the Territory
 - social media and bullying
 - young people not being cared for properly
 - safety, violence, and crime
 - alcohol and other drug use
 - the level of youth support available
 - food and housing security

What do young people want?

We want:

- everyone to have access to the services and support we need to grow up happy and healthy – no matter where we live
- better access to mental health services in urban and remote areas across the NT. This includes:



better access to services that support young people with complex and high-risk mental health needs



better access to youth specific and culturally appropriate mental health services in remote areas of the NT



better access to counselling in school

- better access to sexual health and reproductive health services, particular at school
- menstrual health products and contraceptives to be free and easily accessible for young people, including at school
- free and easily accessible transport for young people and our families to access health services
- better access to health education (both inside and outside of schools) that is designed with, and by, young people. This includes:



sexual health literacy



physical health literacy



mental health literacy and how to best support our peers



information on our rights when accessing health services

- adults to have better education around sexual, physical, and mental health – especially our families
- policies and responses across health, mental health, and education to be linked, recognising the significant intersections that exist in these areas in relation to wellbeing
- better access to services and programs that provide support to young people seeking help for, and reporting instances of, sexual assault
- safe spaces in all our communities that families can enjoy and be active in
- to increase food and housing security across the Territory, especially in remote communities
- to increase support available for young people in the Territory to prevent youth suicide
- all services to be culturally appropriate, with access to interpreters, local knowledge, and local workers

What did our project do?

- we helped Menzies School of Health Research to organise the NT Youth Health Summit

- we advocated to Government in various forums for better health and wellbeing services for young people across the NT
- we elevated the voices of young people in feedback to the NT Government on Action Plan 2 for the NT Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework

What else can we do?

It is recommended that the NT and Commonwealth governments:

- increase investment across Health and Education in programs that address harmful sexualised behaviours in children and young people
- increase investment in peer support and mentoring programs designed specifically for, and with, young people to support their social and emotional wellbeing
- the NT Government Department of Education develops NT wide policies relating to mental health, DFSV, and trauma informed education in schools

- increase access to youth specific and culturally appropriate health supports for young people, such as specialist primary health care, social and emotional wellbeing support and obstetrics, particularly in remote areas of the NT. There is a particular need for access to ongoing care on a long-term basis, particularly in the mental health space, to appropriately address the impacts of trauma on young people and provide thorough care

- support and fully fund the evidenced-based, community-led and supported solutions to food security issues from the AMSANT Food Security Summit in June 2021

It is recommended that the NT Government:

- implements the solutions provided by young people at the 2021 NT Youth Health Summit relating to mental health, sexual health, access to health services and the environment
- commits to provide free contraceptive products in youth-friendly, accessible spaces.

- in addition to the NT Government's menstrual hygiene in schools program, commit to providing free menstrual hygiene and contraceptive products in accessible locations outside of schools
- implements mental health first aid training and education for students, teachers, and parents in all Government schools

It is recommended that the Commonwealth Government:

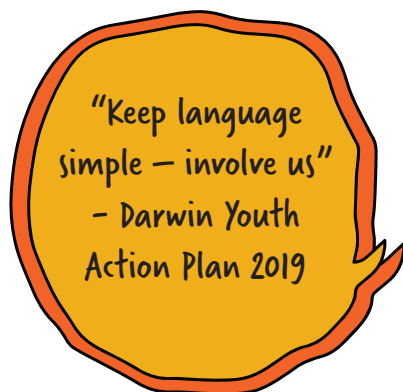
- runs a national campaign to destigmatise sexual health and mental health from a young age
- implements all recommendations provided in the NT Mental Health Coalition submission relating to the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy, to support capacity building of the mental health workforce in the NT

Navigating the 'system'

What have young people said?

- when we spoke with young people and youth workers on our Steering Committee, we talked about what 'the system' means to young Territorians. We spoke about how many Territorians are born into, or experience, the child protection, housing, welfare, and justice systems. We also spoke about how we are born into strong family systems. Some systems disenfranchise us, and some systems empower us – this often depends on our race, gender, and class
- the current 'system' is not set up to support children and young people from diverse backgrounds. It is challenging for us to access information and resources about services and programs that are available
- the 'system' is especially difficult to navigate for Territorians who identify as Aboriginal, who live in remote communities, who are from CALD backgrounds, and who have disability
- for example, things like completing a tax return, applying for driver's licence, and accessing online services (such as Centrelink) can be difficult as these services are not equipped to meet our access needs
- many Territorians also experience internet/technology access and affordability barriers that make it hard for us to access information online. These barriers are more challenging for Territorians who live remote
- social media, particularly Instagram, is a good way to provide information to us
- it is important that information and resources are written in first languages or in plain, simple English
- language, culture, and diversity are some of our strongest assets. It is important that the system utilises these assets
- we usually go to a friend, parent or guardian, relatives, or family friends when we need help. Therefore, it is important that everyone in the community is supported to 'navigate the system'

What do young people want?



We want:

- governments to work with us and our communities to develop and implement innovative approaches that make it easier for us to access information and resources
- service delivery and systems to be simplified and easy for everyone to access regardless of their background
- all Territorians to have access to reliable technology and internet to overcome the current access barriers, particularly in remote areas of the Territory
- governments to prioritise development of accessible resources for young people from diverse backgrounds

- dedicated resources to have a specific national focus on the needs of children and young people. This includes issues such as:

- increasing rates of stress and anxiety
- body image
- mental health and suicide
- alcohol and other drugs
- bullying
- engagement with education
- training and employment
- online safety concerns

- to increase linkages for young people, especially those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, to access a variety of supports from service providers in a coordinated way
- to be provided information and resources in an engaging and easily accessible way – through things like Instagram, reels, TikTok, and interactive posts on social media

What did our project do?

- we shared resources, information, and opportunities for young people on our Youth Voice NT Facebook and Instagram pages

- we launched a new website for young people and the youth sector in the NT, which provides a central location for young people in the NT to access information, resources and opportunities - <https://www.youthvoicent.org.au/>
- we included an information clearinghouse on our Youth Voice NT website so that young people and the youth sector can access research, reports, consultations, and other relevant documents in one place
- we promoted our new directory, 'NTcommunity', and worked with youth sector representatives from across the NT to have youth services added to the directory
- we elevated the voices of young people and the youth sector and acted as a conduit of information and opportunities in:

21 youth network meetings

41 youth sector stakeholder meetings

3 Youth Justice Advisory Committee meetings

28 government and ministerial meetings

10 national youth peak meetings

3 training and information sessions facilitated by Youth Voice NT

10 online training and webinar sessions

4 Youth Voice NT Steering Committee meetings

What else can we do?

It is recommended that the NT and Commonwealth governments:

- provide ongoing funding for a youth peak body in the NT to maintain and expand the Youth Voice NT website – with a specific focus on developing and sharing accessible and culturally appropriate resources for young people in partnership with governments, the non-government youth sector, and young people
- provide ongoing funding for a youth peak body in the NT to facilitate training and workforce development sessions for young people and the youth sector in the NT, with a focus on building capacity and knowledge across priority topics and policy areas
- improve service delivery and system design so that it includes the voices of, and is accessible to, all people in our community, with a particular focus on key support services like NDIS and Centrelink

Our environment

What have young people said?

- protecting the environment is one of our top priorities
- the Territory has a rich and vibrant environment, which is important to all of us
- the climate crisis is the biggest global threat facing humanity, and we are the generation who will be most impacted by this. It is one of our top priorities
- the already hot conditions in the Territory mean we are especially impacted by climate change. The weather is important to us, and changes in the climate are leading to more extreme weather events

- it is hard for us to learn in the classroom when it is hot, noting that some classrooms don't have air-conditioning
- there is a strong nexus between the environment and our health. The environment is a platform to support our mental health and wellbeing
- investing in the renewable energy sector will create thousands of new jobs for Australians



What do young people want?

We want governments to:

- protect our future
- protect our natural diversity and to ensure that our natural environments are not overdeveloped
- stop supporting approaches that harm our environment and cost us more in the long run – like fracking, gas, and fossil fuels
- invest in renewable energy and support Aboriginal led solutions to protect our country
- reduce our carbon footprint
- set ambitious targets for carbon neutrality
- invest in improving housing and infrastructure in remote communities. Our living conditions must meet basic standards
- invest in solar energy and improve access to water in remote areas of the Territory
- recognise the impact of climate change and integrate it into work to address our health and wellbeing
- increase greening and beautification in our communities. We want our communities to be clean and thriving

What did our project do?

- we attended and promoted the School Strike for Climate in Darwin and Mparntwe. We shared a reel from the event on our Instagram that had over 6,800 views and 82 likes
- we elevated the voices of young people and voiced their climate priorities through NTCOSS' policy work on climate justice and economic sustainability

What else can we do?

It is recommended that the NT and Commonwealth governments:

- establish processes and mechanisms for young people's voices to be heard about the impact of climate change and for young people to be directly involved in setting and implementing policies related to the environment. It is imperative that governments utilise existing mechanisms, such as the NT Youth Round Table and the AYAC YLAF, as well as implement new mechanisms that allow a broader group of young people to participate in decision making processes that directly affect our future

- set more ambitious targets and develop stronger plans to address the impacts of climate change, including committing to evidence based solutions¹⁴:



100% renewable energy



reducing our emissions by 75% (below 2005 levels) by 2030



net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2035



no new coal, oil or gas projects

- commit to exporting renewable energy from Australia to promote economic prosperity and create new jobs for Australians
- implement energy efficient standards for all housing dwellings and buildings to ensure we can live healthy and safe lives both now and in the future

The main challenge of this project was the short timeframes available to consult and build relationships with young people and the youth sector. As highlighted earlier in this report, building strong relationships with young people, youth services, and our communities is fundamental to meaningful engagement.

14. Climate Council Australia. 2021. Top 10 large-scale climate solutions.

Challenges

A key finding of our consultations with the youth sector is that many services are under-resourced and over-stretched in their capacity to provide services to young people, as well as facilitate youth consultations. This is further challenging for youth services as youth consultations are not coordinated, due to the lack of a peak body facilitating this work. The high demand on the youth sector generally outweighs the current capacity of services. The short timeframes for this project limited the ability for youth services and young people from across the NT to contribute to and provide feedback on this report.

To overcome these barriers, we formed strong relationships with our Steering Committee and worked closely to ensure the project was led by young people and the youth sector and was responsive to their capacity. This enabled us to deliver the following key deliverables in just under eight months:

- we established and held four Youth Voice NT steering committee meetings, which included young people and youth services from across the NT
- we attended existing NT youth networking forums to act as a conduit of information and opportunities for young people and the youth sector
- in partnership with DropIn Solutions, we established a new website called 'Youth Voice NT', which includes an information clearinghouse of relevant information about and for young people and the youth sector in the NT
- we established a 'Youth Voice NT' Facebook and Instagram page to provide a platform for young people to elevate their voices and access information and resources
- we identified and facilitated training and workforce development sessions for young people and the youth sector in the NT
- we actively engaged with the Commonwealth Government, the NT Government, and national youth peaks to respond to relevant government youth policy changes, enquiries, and consultations
- we analysed and synthesised previous consultations with young people to bring a coordinated approach to youth engagement and conducted new targeted youth consultations to hear directly from young people



What next?

This report only includes the voices of young people who participated in previous youth consultations between 2017 and 2021 in the NT. As outlined earlier in this report, we used this approach to ensure we upheld the key principles of engagement that young people and youth workers said were important. We acknowledge that this report does not represent the voices of all young people in the Territory, nor does it represent all the valuable opinions and ideas young Territorians have about the priority areas outlined in the National Youth Policy Framework. In December 2021, Youth Voice NT will run information sessions to present the findings from the Youth Voice NT project back to the young people and the youth sector in the NT. This will provide an opportunity for young people across the NT to provide feedback about the key findings of the project.

In less than eight months, this project has given the NT representation at national forums, including the AYAC National Youth Advocacy Network and the YLAF. In addition, the Youth Voice NT project has provided the opportunity for the youth sector

and young people to engage and strengthen relationships across the NT, and meaningfully contributed to policy discussions at a national and NT level. With ongoing funding, the Youth Voice NT project can continue to represent the interests of the NT's youth sector and young people. In addition, the project will be able to continue:

- providing sector and professional development services to the youth sector and young people in line with recommendations provided in the accompanying report titled 'A glance at the NT Youth Sector'
- providing a unified voice for young people and the youth sector to governments
- operating as an advisor to governments in relation to policies affecting young people in the NT

As it stands, the Territory's young people are likely to find it much more challenging to participate in these structures without a peak body or peak role to support us. At the time of writing, there is a lack of certainty about ongoing funding for the Youth Voice NT project. Therefore, it is recommended that the NT Government further supports

young Territorians and the NT youth sector by committing to ongoing funding for the Youth Voice NT project and to establish a youth peak in the NT.



What consultations did we include in this report?

In total, the voices of young people from 19 previous documents were used to inform this report. This included:

2021

- Menzies School of Health Research NT Youth Health Summit 2021: Interim Report October 2021
- 2021 Youth Strategy Consultation Report: City of Darwin - Youth Strategy 2022-2026
- 2021 NT Youth Round Table Meeting 1 notes
- What Girls Want in Sport Uniforms to make them feel comfortable and confident to participate in sport: A National Study
- Office of the Children's Commissioner Submission to the draft National Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy

2020

- Mission Australia Youth Survey Report 2020
- Tennant Creek Youth Action Plan 2020-2022
- Youth X Your Voice in Palmerston 2020
- Office of the Children's Commissioner Annual Report 2019 - 2020

2019

- Commonwealth Government Department of Health Youth Taskforce Interim Report: December 2019
- Building the National Child and Family Wellbeing Plan Beyond 2020: Consultation with the NT Government Office for Youth - Youth Roundtable 21 November 2019
- Menzies School of Health Research NT Youth Health Summit 2019 Report
- Mparntwe/Alice Springs Youth Action Plan 2019-2021
- Katherine Youth Action Plan 2019
- Darwin Youth Action Plan 2019
- Child Friendly Alice Technical Report: About the children and families of Alice Springs 2019
- Holding the Space: Collaboration with young people in Palmerston 2018-2019

2017

- Keeping strong: Digital technology, participatory research, and young people's wellbeing amongst Alice Springs Town Camp communities
- Time to Talk Alice Springs: 2017 NT Youth Round Table

